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THE LIGHT WHICH
LIGHTETH EVERY MAN



THE
LIGHT WHICH LIGHTETH EVERY MAN.

SERMONS,

BY
ALEXANDER R. RUSSELL,
LATE CURATE OF HERSTMONCEUX.

"IF THOU SEEKEST JESUS IN ALL THINGS, THOU SHALT SURELY FIND JESUS; BUT IF THOU SEEKEST THYSELF, THOU SHALT ALSO FIND THYSELF, BUT TO THINE OWN DESTRUCTION."—*Thomas A' Kempis.*



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**HOPE AND CO.,
16, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.**

TO
THAT PORTION OF THE FLOCK OF CHRIST,
TO WHICH IT HAS BEEN MY PRIVILEGE
TO MINISTER,
IN EMSWORTH, IN TUNBRIDGE WELLS, AND IN HERSTMONCEUX,
This Volume is Dedicated,
WITH MUCH AFFECTION,
BY
A. R. R.



PREFACE.

HAVING been called, in the course of God's providence, to go forth as a Colonial Missionary, I publish the present volume as a parting offering to those dear friends and brethren, in English parishes, to whom it has been my privilege to minister. It is not a regular course of sermons, devoted to the illustration of a particular subject: the title has been chosen merely to indicate the general character of the preaching from which these samples have been selected, of the nature of that message with which the preacher considers himself charged, and which it will be his earnest aim to deliver, with as little admixture of human notions or individual leanings as possible, to whatever region of the earth he may be called and sent. The publication has, for its primary

object, to revive on the minds of such as listened to these Sermons, any solemn and salutary impressions they were able to convey ; but I trust I may hope, that some others who read them may be led by them to look into their Bibles more than they have hitherto done, for a revealing of God's will and God's character and God's purposes to man, rather than for a discovery of their own particular notions, and foregone conclusions. With this end kept in view, the total absence of theological discussion will surprise no one. Controversial, irritating debate, on things on and round about religion, and on the details of church order, are as unsuitable to the pulpit, except in very special instances, as they are hateful everywhere to those who, like the Psalmist, are oppressed by the mysteries of their own nature, and are chiefly intent on being so led, by God's teaching and discipline, that they shall never err from His way.

It is one great aim of all religious teaching to destroy the spirit of self-seeking, to lead men away from their sins, and the selfish pleasure sought in them, to give themselves up to God, to obey His "vocation," and to exercise that "min-

istry" to which He has called every one of them. But, of course, where the teachers are themselves imperfect, and positively sinful creatures, there will often enter, even into the teaching which seeks to wean men from sin, a large alloy of selfishness and corruption. And thus it has often happened that religion has been taught, not as a recognition of an actual relation subsisting between God and man, and of the duties incumbent on us in that relation, but rather as a scheme for the deliverance of man from an amount of present and future suffering which, in the natural course of things, seemed all but inevitable, and for the attainment of that personal happiness which is one of our most predominant desires.

On this view of the matter, the Gospel is held to mean the glad tidings of deliverance from wrath and punishment, and the bestowal of a felicity which is never to end. The connection between holiness and happiness is, indeed, wholly lost sight of by no class of religious teachers who are really in earnest; but yet the pre-eminent motive suggested by a large class of teachers and preachers, in urging men to high spiritual effort, is that very love of self, which is the bane of all real improve-

ment, the obstacle to all endeavours after goodness of a large and worthy sort.

It would, however, be unpardonable, in this generation, to continue unconscious of this tendency, or to cease striving against it—unpardonable, at least, in those who feel the deep responsibility of being the bearers of that message which, in some form or other, is to bring salvation within man's reach—if it is ever to be brought within his reach at all. As a message of salvation we have been taught to deliver it; as a message, on the acceptance or rejection of which hang the issues of life and death; as that which satisfies, as nothing else can satisfy, man's hunger and thirst for righteousness and peace; by rejecting which he dooms himself to famine, and to a state of spiritual death. But then it must be clearly seen that salvation means the deliverance of man, not merely from destruction, but from *that which is destroying* him; not merely the miraculous abolition of the consequences of sin, but the uprooting from his nature of those evil tendencies, which, so long as they are retained, must reproduce these miserable consequences in endless ghastly and terrific forms: in a word, the leading him

out of that evil nature with which he has allied himself, into perfect oneness and reconciliation with Him who is the source of life and goodness. And for *this* purpose the Son of God has been manifested. He is the life of men ; fleeing from whom they flee from life, and slide back into the fathomless gulf of death. He is the light of men ; recoiling from whom they wander away into the realm of darkness. In the grand tidings of the Gospel, therefore, HE stands foremost. Not dogmas about the mode of justification, or the chronology of the various steps in the spiritual change (which, after all, is rather an analytic view of the work than the work itself), but CHRIST, the living and eternal Saviour, must form the chief topic of the preacher's ministry. Here is the central point in their connection with which all the parts of the Christian scheme cohere. It is here that we find the full significance of the curse, with its accompanying promise of Redemption, at length brought clearly out. Many notes that, as we heard them singly uttered, seemed harsh and jarring, are now seen to be beautifully harmonious.

The whole history of God's dealings with man

is found to have been nothing but the gradual unfolding of one grand and loving purpose. The Old Testament and the New bring in their several contributions to the one connected statement—that there is an actual relation between God and man; that this relation was attempted to be broken by the false spirit who brought sin into the world and all our woe; that, though never wholly sundered, it was changed and rendered less intimate; but that it has been again knit together by Christ, who came as the Eternal Son, to make Himself one of us, to call us His brethren, and to unite us to the Father in a blessed and eternal fellowship. Even the Law, with all its positive statutes, and all its prohibitory threatenings, bore witness that there is a right and a wrong way for man, and that he bears a true relation to a Righteous God; but the Gospel has borne witness, no less outspokenly, to the fact that this relation is an eternal one; that the righteous God, with whom man is once more made one, is also the Father of Spirits, in living union with whom is the sole ground of permanence for either life or goodness. He has become, not formally and legally merely, but really and truly, the new Head of our race. As

in Adam all died, so in Christ all have been made alive. And thus to every man who comes into the world, He is at once life and light—the bringer of life, the revealer of the great news that it has been actually brought. I have chosen for these sermons the latter title, because they are chiefly connected with the subject of Christ's manifestation, and aim more specially to set Him forth as a revealer of life than as the giver of it. What I have been trying stammeringly to say is, that He has revealed it, as He has given it, to *all* who will receive it; that the things which prevent men from receiving it are obstacles, not on God's side, but on their own; that, however men may mistake the character of their relation to Him, and however ruinous for themselves may be the practical consequences of that mistake; however the Devil may strive to confirm them in it—yet God is unweariedly showing them, in the person of His blessed Son, and in all the operations of His grace, what are His real thoughts and designs regarding them; that He is not their enemy, and has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth; that they who die are such as, in the mad wilfulness of their hearts, refuse to trust Him; but that if they should, ever

so late, come to themselves, in their Father's house there is room for them, there is work to do, there are peace, and gladness of heart, and words of forgiveness, and pledges of reconciliation in store or them. Had I not in my heart believed this truth, I could never have dared to open my mouth before the congregation of God, as a bearer of glad tidings from Him. Had I believed that there is any man, in any congregation, to whom Christ is not a light—*the* light—by whom, however he may have wandered into the regions of darkness, and gathered around him the shadows of death, he may be guided back to the realm of day, and made to rejoice in the salvation of God, there would have been in my heart such a sense of contradiction between the despairing conviction within and the gladsome words of Gospel welcome on my lips, that it must have choked my utterance and paralyzed the vigour of all pastoral labours. But because I believe that, according to the divine constitution of things, Christ will shine into the heart of every one who seeks His light; because I believe, with an intensity of conviction which it is impossible to express in words, that this is the order of things which must eventually prevail;

that Satan is not to be allowed to hoodwink man for ever; that God is mightier than all who set themselves against Him; and that no word of His can return to Him void—therefore I have never yet lost heart, and never will lose heart, however wickedness and impenitence may abound. Men may sin against God, and then dread the thought of Him; Satan may come in with his horrible lies and ghastly contrivances of deadly and destroying pleasure, to slander God, and make them seek happiness away from Him; and eventually they may learn to hate Him as one very hard, and strict, and cruel. This is what was meant, in a previous sentence, by men's going away into darkness, by their gathering around them shadows. For darkness is to the body what ignorance of God's true nature is to the spirit; and the shadowy forms which haunt the realms of darkness, and are not altogether illusions of the senses, but have some foundation in reality, are a fitting emblem of the distorted and terrific shape in which all the truths of religion present themselves to those whose sins have thus cast darkness and despair upon their souls.

But Christ has come to rescue man from these

deadening influences. He has come to triumph over Satan ; commanding all men, everywhere, to repent, and so declaring repentance possible to all ; showing that, in the despairing thoughts which have grown up in the heart, and rendered truthful confidence impossible, the Devil has been lying to man, and presenting to him, in the name of God, a horribly distorted and unreal image ; showing that God is love, that He is a Father ; that though He is of spotless purity, yet He can love the sinner, and does love him, and has shown that love by sending His Son into the world that, through faith in Him, all men might be saved. By showing men the Father, He draws them to Him. He enlightens them concerning Him. He proves to them that their normal condition is not that of separation from, but of oneness with, Him. Thus He is the light to every man that will follow His light. Aye, and even on those who will not follow it, that light shines. St. John speaks of it as shining in a darkness, which does not comprehend it. What is the condemnation ? That light has not come ? That they have sinned beyond redemption, and God will not save them ? No. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the

world, but men loved darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil."

But, finding out the real character of sin; learning at last that it is an accursed and evil possession; desiring at last to flee from their evil deeds as from the hateful companions of wickedness, who first lead astray and then torment the sinner—the good Lord who has beheld them, amid all their struggles and wanderings, will not refuse to hear their cry. And the preacher is ready; the messenger of Christ is ready to say: "He is here, after whom you are at last seeking, if haply you may find Him. See, on high, your Saviour stands at the right hand of God's throne, pleading for you now, as once He suffered for you on earth, reconciling you to the Father, if you will be reconciled, drawing you to Him, giving you the spirit of adoption, and the heritage of a son." And oh! not once or twice on earth, but thousands and thousands of times, have sorrowful and suffering men heard that good news with a great cry of joy, as they have beheld "what manner of love" their Father's is. From a state which one such rejoicing spirit described in looking back upon it as a "horrible pit," from a state in which there

was no certain footing beneath their feet, they have been made to bless God at last that He has put a new song into their mouth, and established all their goings. May every reader of this book enter into the divine comfort of so great and sure a truth. May every minister of God's word go forth in the strength of it, and, not suffering it to run only in the narrow channel of his own formal system, or of his own individual experience, let it have free course, and be glorified. Especially may every missionary carry it with him across the sea, and tell it out among the heathen, proclaiming, in the face of all their fears, the eternal love and the eternal Fatherhood of God. Thus only will he successfully "invade the realm of light and eternal death, and open the kingdom of Heaven."

A. R. R.

April 3rd, 1854.

SERMON I.

THE EPIPHANY; OR, CHRIST'S MANIFESTATION TO THE GENTILES.

“ When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews ? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.”—St. Matthew ii. 1, 2.

WITH the story of the wise men, coming from afar to do homage to the infant Christ, and to lay at His feet their precious gifts, the Church ushers in the season of the Epiphany. In this we can see two distinct aims, the one of which is quite subordinate to the other. Thus it is a truth taught in the Holy Gospel for this day, though one accidental to the main purpose of its selection, that in however humble a guise the Saviour of the world, or His doctrine, has come to us, He summons the proudest of this world's wise men to do Him

homage. There are gifts far more costly than aloes, or frankincense, or myrrh, with which He has enriched them, which they are required to consecrate to Him, in the same spirit of willing subjection in which these three appeared before Him. Although not many wise, or noble, or mighty, are called, yet it is only because but few will suffer a call to reach them which demands of them the entire renunciation of all which they have hitherto counted of highest worth. This, however, is not the thought on which I now desire to fix your attention. It is not to the few men of high cultivation and wisdom, but to the many of ordinary endowments and knowledge, that the message of the Gospel is sent. To them the Church would this day set forth, as more essential, the truth that Christ is "that light who, coming into the world, lighteth every man;" that in the soul of the ignorant heathen, who dwells in a far country, there is a desire for such a King and Lord as He is, there is a star by whose guiding he may find Him; and that the first act of those who have thus sought and found Him, is to offer something to him, the richest and best things that they have, the abundance of their material wealth, the active

energies of their bodies, or the priceless, hidden treasures of their minds and hearts.

Both of these messages—as well that which is less, as that which is more comprehensive—are exceedingly valuable. It is well for the scholar or philosopher, who is but too apt, in the large development of his powers and the ease with which he is able to command a various range of knowledge, to become puffed up with vainglorious and self-sufficient thoughts—it is well for such an one to be taught to recognise his subjection to one who is his Master; to be convinced that he is not a God unto himself; that there are other needs and longings in his nature than those which any kind of intellectual acquirement can satisfy; and that, for the full and perfect satisfaction of these he must repair to Him who of old lay, as an infant, in the lowly stable of Bethlehem. Important, however, as this is, yet it probably does not so closely concern us who are here, as the other message which this day brings to us. There may be many of us who, for our own part, are little concerned with that teaching which is specially designed for the wise; for very many can lay no claim even to that comparative wisdom to which

the few may have attained. Ignorant of many things even which lie within the range of our ordinary observation—wholly unable, it may be, to reason out to ourselves a consistent scheme of opinion on the deepest matters; we are ready enough to acknowledge our helplessness, nor are we in danger of being restrained by intellectual pride from seeking the helpful hand of Him who never disdains the humble seeker after heavenly wisdom. The danger of many, if not the most of us, lies far more on the side of sleepy, sensual apathy, than on that of restless intellectual activity. The lesson which concerns us most, therefore, is not that which applies to some particular men of great parts or learning, but that which applies to all men who have sinned, and are seeking for a Saviour. For, as there is none of us for whom there is not a place in God's kingdom, there is none who can hear the cry of Christ's Epiphany, or Manifestation, once more taken up by the Church and repeated to all her children, without feeling himself personally addressed. Often as we repeat that article of the creed which speaks of a Holy Catholic Church, we are now called upon to see that we really believe it, and this, not as a

beautiful ideal after which we are to endeavour, but as a thing actually realised and existing in the world.

The whole history of Christ's manifestation to the nations is deeply interesting. Every single step in it possesses an essential value in the evolution of the whole grand purpose to which it belongs. In tracing that history, we should, to be thoroughly accurate, begin long before the actual presence of Christ on earth. But the earlier manifestations were clouded and uncertain. The first more *distinct* announcement that it was God's gracious purpose thus to reveal Himself to the whole race of man, ~~consisted~~ in the selection of the Jewish people to be the Church and Kingdom of God. Then men became members of a divine community, and religion now for the first time appeared in contact with the personal and social life of man. In no proper sense of the words could the theocracy be described as an exclusive church or kingdom, in contradistinction to the Universal, or Catholic Church, hereafter to be founded. Nay, rather it was the rudimental establishment of that kingdom, under the rule and governance of a distinct person—the One God, the True God, the

Living God—into which at length all men were to be called. In it “all families of the earth” were to be blessed. In this there was nothing narrow, nothing exclusive. The call of Abraham has sometimes been interpreted to mean the arbitrary selection of one particular family to privileges from partaking in which the rest of the world were excluded. In like manner, the call of the Gospel has been explained as if it meant the call of a small minority of men to salvation, leaving the rest of the world with no definite prospect before them but that of perdition. But man makes sad confusion amid the doings of God. Measuring His grand designs by a contracted standard, he would fain have us read the Scripture, as if it declared, not that “God so loved the world,” but only “so loved the predestinate portion of it,” that He sent His Son into it for its salvation. Against all such limitations of God’s loving and world-embracing message, the Church to-day takes up her earnest protest.

When God called Abraham to go out from his father’s house to a land of promise, He was making known to man what he did not previously know—that the Gods in whom men were trusting were

no gods; that there is one living and true God who is the "King of men;" that apart from Him all is anarchy, anomaly, and confusion; that therefore all must be brought into their rightful and natural position of subjection to Him. For the more distinct manifestation of this, He chose a particular nation, whose special business it should be to bear witness of it to the rest of the world; and ordained a special rite, which should bear witness of it to each individual man born into the Divine Kingdom, or adopted into it. And thus, in the election of the Jewish people, and the institution of the right of circumcision, the first step was taken towards the establishment among men, of a Church, at once holy and catholic. Had it not been so, the uncircumcision never could have been accounted as the circumcision, the believing Gentiles never could have entered on the inheritance rejected of the Jews.

The next step in this history occurred when the Jews, through their self-seeking spirit, seemed on the point of frustrating the purpose of their calling, and when Christ came down from Heaven, to present Himself on earth as the head of the kingdom. It was at the moment when men

seemed most in danger of losing their hold on the truth that God is the Father of them all, that Christ came as the Eternal Son of God, to reveal Him once more, and to draw all His sinful children back to Him by the powerful attraction of His own love. It is on this point in the history that this season naturally fixes our attention.

And surely there was that in the position of the heathen world at the particular crisis in question, which marked it out as the eve of a new era.

At the very time when the nations of the earth were best prepared to welcome a Saviour, then it was that His manifestation took place. There was everywhere an expectation of change, and that not partial but universal not having reference to one nation alone, but affecting the general interests of the human race. To this mysterious and portentous feeling, political and religious causes alike contributed. The whole world had for a long period been under the absolute sway of the vast, and now overgrown and unwieldy, Empire of Rome; but at length wise men were beginning to see, in its very vastness, as well as in the growing luxury, the laxity of manners,

the increasing softness and effeminacy of the Roman people, the symptoms of its approaching decay. This feeling, however, was not confined to the wise and thoughtful. Among the crowd we are told that mysterious sayings began to be handed about from mouth to mouth, as to the rise of some great power which was to take the place of Rome; and the situation of the empire was such as to give these an importance they might not otherwise have possessed. The Jewish people, on their part, sank under a painful and intolerable bondage, were all on the alert, watching the signs of the times; and the alarm of Herod, on the birth of Jesus, may serve to show how widely this sense of insecurity, and this anticipation of change, had spread. Contemporary history tells us that these expectations were likewise shared by Gentile nations. Nor was it only the *political* position of heathen people, at that time, which gave to all this a character of reality and importance. The state of *religious* opinion no less strikingly distinguished the period as a very marked and important crisis. Here, also, the old systems were manifestly giving away. Over the larger portion of the enlightened heathens idolatry

had lost all practical power. Only among the more ignorant class of people were men found rendering hearty homage to the idols of their respective nations. The educated and thoughtful among them were in their hearts beginning to be well satisfied of the lying nature of the idolatrous worship, however they might, from motives of policy, connive at what acted as a restraint on the passions of the multitude.

Yet this may well be believed to have been a sad discovery. There is that in man's nature which makes it pre-eminently sad to find out that the faith in which he has been trusting is baseless as any dream; to wake up from a long delusion, and find himself in a world like this, without a God, and without a faith. And, indeed, it would have been nothing gained, had philosophy only discovered to the pagan the folly of his religious endeavours. Wild and fanatical they might be, but they were still the honest activity of a soul following hard after God, though as yet in vain; nor could anything have been more disastrous than a mere lapse into utter incredulity and indifference. No mind can maintain itself against the waves and blasts of sin and sorrow on such a

foundation ; and it would be an almost superfluous cruelty to steal from man the hopes, however delusive, which he has built on his conformity to the requirements of an idolatrous worship, unless we could guide him to a foundation of more substantial hope in the religion we have ourselves received from God. The evil spirits which possessed his soul may indeed be driven forth ; but when thus swept and garnished, other still worse spirits may enter in, and inflict more grievous and lasting injuries.

If we rejoice, then, that men were thus being disabused of their deepest-rooted errors, we rejoice thus because they were prepared, as nothing else could have prepared them, to welcome the news of Christ's most blessed manifestation.

Looking over all the world of living men, it did indeed seem as if a crisis in their history had now arrived. Their attitude, however unconsciously, was that of solemn, anxious expectation. Well it might be ; for now was to be fulfilled that for which the righteous of old had looked with trembling hope ; which they had sought to help forward by pious and urgent supplications ; and out of which was to arise a total revolution in the

social and religious life of man. The spiritual conflict, in which the kingdom of Satan was to be shaken to its centre, was now preparing for its direst issue. The powers of good and evil seemed once more mustering and rallying to the strife. The mystic and inspired sayings of antiquity were at last to be resolved in all the plentitude of their dark but pregnant meaning. The traditionary hope of a Redeemer with which God had mitigated the curse: the yearnings of pagans whom the husks of idolatry could no longer satisfy: the intimations of God's prophets, and of holy men in every age—these were now drawing near to the attainment of their utmost anticipations, and the fulfilment of their largest promises. Philosophers, confused by the rival claims of conflicting schools of opinion, baffled by the central mysteries which met them at every turn, in their inquiries into the character and purpose of their being, were eager for some surer standard of truth, some deeper foundation of faith, and some nobler rule of life. The cheats and mockeries that had been practised on them by the priests of the old mythology, now stood, for the most part, detected and exposed before their bold and eager spirit of inquiry. The

false foundation of their ancient beliefs had been discovered ; the palpably human and fraudulent origin of many of their former objects of veneration had become too apparent. The rites of the temple worship, to which formerly they had attached the highest importance, seemed now stripped of all their sacredness ; their traditions of the past, and their expectations of the future, had no certainty or distinctness, but floated before them like fantastic and visionary forms.

While the heathen world was thus prepared, however, much yet remained to be done for them. They had abjured the falsehood ; but they had not yet reached forward to the truth. They had forsworn the fables on which the credulity of ages had fed. Many old things had passed away ; but all things had not quite as yet become new. Finding out how little the contrivances of idolatry could do to satisfy the soul's want, there was yet no man who could give them to eat of the true bread of life. There remained in their hearts a dreary void—a comfortless sense of something wanting, which they knew not how to supply ; a vague, and as yet unsatisfied, longing for righteousness and truth, for some worthy object

on which they might concentrate all their capacities of love, and faith, and devotion.

Then it was that One came among them who said: "I am the bread of life; he that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." Aye, and they *might* come, every pagan among them! For He was manifested to *all*. He took the form and nature of man, not the form or nature peculiar to any particular set of men. "God was manifest in the flesh." And, while Jesus lies yet a babe in the manger at Bethlehem, behold! three Gentile strangers come to claim Him as their King. The time at which this happened is full of significance. He had no sooner become "very man of very man,"—thereby showing that His was a kingdom for all mankind—than the wise men of the Gentiles were called from far to do Him homage, that thus the universal character of the blessings and privileges He confers might be symbolically declared.

Abraham might be supposed to represent his own race; but Christ is the unquestionable type of humanity. He did not merely become a Jew; He "was made flesh," and thus all the dwellers

in this fleshly tabernacle are the sharers in the blessings He has brought. The Gentile wise men, coming from a far country to present their costly gifts to Christ, are but a sign or symbol of the greater wonder yet to be revealed—when men shall come from every region of the earth, and find Christ, and be found of Him.

We have thus seen, my brethren, how God not only sent His Son to be our Saviour, but prepared a lost and helpless world for His reception. But it is no less instructive, in reference to the recollections of this Festival, to notice the gradual nature of the process by which Our Blessed Lord prepared the way for the full admission of the Gentiles to His kingdom. His manifestation to them from the first, was never sudden. Slowly the good news broke upon them. The first commission which He gave to His chosen ministers differed widely from the last. He sent them forth, and commanded them, saying: "Go *not* into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Considering the purpose for which the Jews had been called, it was necessary that they should

first have an opportunity of receiving Christ and His message. If, at length, they should persist in rejecting Him, at least mighty works must first be done among them, and Jesus fully manifested to them in all His manifold workings of power and love, as the God-man, that so they might be without excuse. Yet even then there were instances in which distinguished Gentile faith was rewarded by distinguished divine favour. Such were the miracles wrought on the Canaanite woman, the nobleman's son, and the Centurion's servant. Abraham was far more the father of such as these than of his own unbelieving descendants ; and Christ was in their case showing plainly that all who could receive Him, of whatever nation, were very welcome to Him. This is especially conspicuous in the case of the Centurion, concerning whom Jesus said : " I have not found so great faith ; no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of Heaven." There was thus no wavering in God's purpose, from first to last. Necessary as it was that the people of Israel, who were looking for Christ's redemption,

should have an opportunity of recognising Him as the true Messiah; and that others of the Jews, filled with Pharisaic pride, should have an opportunity of finally refusing that redemption, and thus *shutting themselves out*; yet it was the Lord's intention throughout to bring in the scattered tribes of the Gentiles, and to give them a place in His earthly kingdom. All through His public ministry indications of this are occasionally presenting themselves; but towards the close of it, these become more frequent and distinct. He gives His disciples plainly to understand that other sheep he has which are not of His fold, whom also He must bring, that all may be one fold, under one shepherd. And His last injunction, before ascending to the Father, is the plainest of all—that parting legacy to the Church in which His dearest wish is reserved to the last: “Go ye, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.”

Alas! brethren, that it should have been so long before this parting admonition of our Lord was

fully obeyed. Alas! that we in England should have lagged so far behind in the work of making Jesus manifest to the heathen.

At first, indeed, the Apostles did not even understand the *meaning* of their Lord's words. To the lost sheep of the house of Israel, scattered throughout the world, they were indeed ready to bear abroad the good news that He had come, "of whom Moses, in the law, and the prophets, did write." But to the people among whom their countrymen were sojourning, they were soon taught that the blessed Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ was also to be made known; and as the development of the Lord's purpose had, from the first, been slow and gradual, so also it was by successive events of a remarkable kind, that His chosen disciples were enabled fully to comprehend it. Not until a Gentile believer, whose prayers and alms had come up as a memorial before God, had presented his claim of admission: not until a Christian apostle had been warned in a dream to receive him; did the followers of Christ fully understand the universal character of the divine society into which they had themselves been gathered.

But as soon as that great truth was realised, we see its immediate influence on their conduct, in the renewed energy with which they set themselves to carry abroad that larger message which was now committed to them; forgetting now all distinction between Jew and Gentile, and soon learning to forget all other distinctions whatever as they came to realise more fully the equality of all men before God, and the destined unity of all men in the Body of Christ. In God's kingdom they were now to proclaim that "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free, but Christ is all, and in all." With that great news, they made haste, in those early and real days of Christian work, to cross seas and deserts, and dare difficulties and dangers, and bring in their heathen brethren to be partakers in the Christian election. When Christ was rejected by the Jews, they turned them to the Gentiles; and having firmly grasped the truth, that "God hath made of one blood all the nations of the earth;" that none are the natural enemies of God, save in so far as their sins have made them so; and that these sins once repented and renounced, they are welcome back to His

favour and His home, and will be received with exceeding joy by God himself, their loving father, and by their elder brethren who stand near His throne. And so often, brethren, as the Church in later days has lost its hold on this truth, just so often has the spirit of primitive zeal and reality dwindled away. When the idea of the race of man, as forming that great society which Christ has redeemed from the curse, and all whose members God would unite in one Holy Catholic Church, has been lost and, men have sat down content with the assurance of their own election to eternal life, or with their own possession of those spiritual privileges which help them to the attainment of it—then God has punished them for their selfish use of His mercy to themselves—aye, and punished them after the manner of their sin. For while they have thus neglected to go forth to others in a spirit of noble ardour and self-sacrifice, their religion has dwindled down into a habit of sordid dreaming on the things *they* are to have, when the Lord brings them to His heavenly kingdom; and thus the very spirit of ardour has died within them, and their own souls have become parched and lifeless. Through the long, dull level

of the Dark Ages, when men had sunk down into this condition, or into a condition worse than this, we have abundant evidence of the retribution with which God pursues this sin. The Crusaders' cry was but a fitful and noble protest against the selfishness which was creeping over the religious life of Europe ; and in the heat of that transient enthusiasm, those higher efforts in behalf of Christ's scattered flock to which the memories of the cross and the sepulchre were so powerfully calling His followers, were again lost sight of. It was not, indeed (except in the first age of all), till these later years, that the Church learned to act fairly out this conviction, that Christ has been made manifest to all nations ; that nothing can absolve us from guilt if, resting content with our isolated privileges, we strive to divorce ourselves from our natural connection with the whole body of man, and decline the duty arising out of that connection, of making known, in the farthest borders of the earth, the news of Christ's Redemption.

Let us thank God that at last this is beginning to be understood. Let us thank Him that all who call themselves Christians are now acting upon it, and above all, that our own Church, at

the beginning of last century, when all around was so cold and dead, led the van in the revival of missionary enterprise. Already marvellous results have ensued. Ethiopia is stretching out her hands to God : on a thousand distant shores and islands of the sea, the power of God's redeeming love is celebrated by Gentile converts ; and for us, brethren, while our bishops and clergy, in climates the most ungenial, and in solitudes the most desolate, are hasting to their Apostolic work, it remains for us to help them with the voice of unwearied prayer, to strengthen their hands by dedicating our sons to the same service, and to pour into the treasury our plentiful offerings, that nothing may be wanting on our part to make Christ in deed and in truth manifest to the Gentiles.

Nor must we stop here. We must ask with increasing earnestness, whether He has become really manifest to our own selves ; whether He is to us the bread of life ; whether, in our daily meditations and prayers, and in our frequent attendance at the feast in which we celebrate His death, we love to commune with Him.

For all the outer religious excitements are

worthless if the inner converse of the soul with God, through Christ, be wanting. Our zeal for missions may be nothing but the effervescent interest excited by the tale of any romantic enterprise ; and in that case we do but mock our own souls. Probe your hearts, then, brethren ; see that you are not imposing on the world and on yourselves by any merely outward signs of so great a thing as true, heartfelt devotion to Christ. Outward ordinances and the visible activities of a pure Church, are very blessed to see and share in ; but remember that you have been called into that Church to receive Christ your Saviour into your very heart ; that being thus united to Him, in deed and in truth, you may show forth, in the abundant pure activity of a holy life, that for Him you are living, and that in Him you hope at last to die.

SERMON II.

THE THINGS WHICH MARY PONDERED.

(21st Sunday after Trinity, 1853.)

“ Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.”—St. Luke ii. 19.

MY Brethren, I know of nothing in all the Bible to which the heart turns with such gladness, or in which it finds such refreshment, as that old history of Our Saviour's birth, of which we have this morning been reading in the Second Lesson. From the Old Testament statutes and threatenings and judgments; from perpetual indications of an ever-widening separation between God and the children of men, which the Old Testament history contains; we pass, at the very beginning of the Gospel histories, into a new region, and seem to breathe an altogether different atmosphere. The terrors which had gathered round the awful name of

Jehovah, melt away before the blest revealing of the Saviour's matchless love and grace. You have often heard and read the simple, touching story of His early infancy; and two months hence, if God spare our lives till then, it will form the burden of the Church's message to you once more.

I do not now intend to anticipate that Christmas teaching, in so far as it concerns Him who, as on that day, though He was the mighty Saviour of the world, yet lay in the arms of His happy mother, like any other helpless little child. But in the group within the stable at Bethlehem there is another figure on which the eye rests.

It is that of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The eye lingers upon her with a kind of wonder, as on one, the real nature of whose calling it is so difficult to understand. Not, indeed, that we would make her an object of veneration, save in so far as she, a sinful woman, was called to higher privileges than have fallen to the lot of any other mortal. Nor yet is it to muse on these peculiar honours, bestowed on her by God's choosing, that we linger over her name; but rather because of what we are here told concerning her. Just before this, cer-

tain strange things had happened to her, which, as she could not explain them, she still *kept, and pondered in her heart*. She did not understand them, and because she did not, she thought about them the more. Their strangeness was, indeed, all she knew about them, except that they were real and true. Whither they were tending she could not tell. Even the meaning of the different messages God has sent her, she could only dimly guess at, through the mystic language in which they were couched. Let us think what some of the things were, which she thus pondered, that so we may gain some profit from her pondering.

First of all *an angel had appeared to her*. This was passing strange. She read, it is true, as you can read in the Old Testament you have at home, how angels had appeared to very holy men of old to tell them good things, or to wicked men, to bid them mind what they were doing; for God knew their ways. She read, and read with a believing heart, the old Bible stories of Abraham, and Jacob, and Balaam, and Gideon, and Elijah, and the rest, to whom angels had appeared. But it was many a long day since God had thus talked with man.

Because men had become so unbelieving, and did not care to hear the message God sent by angels, or because they had become too carnal in their thoughts, and would have made gods of those angels who were only His creatures and His ministers, or because He had now a better way of teaching them, through His holy prophets, so it was that, for many a long year, no angel of God had appeared to man. So long ago was it, and so strange did it seem, that there were actually some men, in the days when Mary lived, who were bold enough to say that the Bible stories about angels were all lies or dreams, and that, in fact, there was no such thing, and never had been any such thing, as an angel. Now, does it not seem singular that just at that time we should read words like these?—"And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary."

No wonder that she was, at first, a little afraid. The like of what had just happened to her had not (except just before, in connection with the same thing) happened for hundreds of years, and then

only to persons who were great and famous in the history of her nation ; and she, as she looked at the little cottage in which she lived, at her parents who had brought her up as a girl, or at the honest carpenter who was shortly to be her husband, could hardly fancy herself either great or famous. It was wonderful that an angel should have appeared at all—more wonderful that he should have appeared to *her*. And what he said to her when he did come, when he spoke of “the holy thing that was to be born of her”—*that* was most wonderful of all. In this state of amazement, what then did she do? Did she look vacantly at God’s messenger, as we might ourselves look at anything unheard of ; and then, amid the cares of her hard work-a-day life, forget all about it? Did she say—as I have heard people say—that she could make nothing of it, and it was no good thinking about it? Or did she boast to her friends about the great honour God had done her? Or, again, did she build upon it selfish and vain dreams of greatness and fame that were to be hers?

I daresay, my friends, she had her own thoughts about it. She was a very poor and humble maiden, but she was a pious one ; and

very likely she had often been grieved at heart, as she looked round her, and saw the pride of the Pharisees, and the unbelief of the Sadducees, and the utter deadness and neglect of religion everywhere ;—God not now, in the eyes of her people, what He had been in the old time—the living God, the mighty, ever-present Helper. And she saw how, as her people thought less of God, and feared Him less, except with the fear of slaves, and loved Him less, and made His will less the guiding principle of their lives, He had given them up to their indifference, to their poor, hollow pride, to all their evil ways, and was leaving them to find out what sort of world this is without Him for a helper. Knowing all this, Mary was very likely disposed in her heart to hail this angel's appearance as a promise of better things. It did look very much as if God, long absent, were about to draw near to His people again, and to pour His messages of grace and warning into the ears of all such as would willingly receive them. But she did not feel herself wise enough, or learned enough, to say what the real meaning of it was ; and when she saw what kind of men the rabbis or teachers of her nation were—mere

stiff, cold-hearted rigorists—she knew that she was not likely to get substantial help from them. Yet the thing, though strange, evidently *had* a meaning; she saw in the words of the angel, as clearly as possible, a promise of something great yet to be revealed; and therefore she did the very best and wisest thing that any one can do who is in doubt as to the meaning of God's mysterious dealings with him. She kept this thing, and pondered it in her heart.

Even she, my brethren, knew a little of what we now know far more fully, that "God is His own interpreter," and will make all His dealings with us so plain that, some time or other, we shall be made to adore the wisdom and love which guided them, and be ashamed of the passing doubts and murmurs of complaint with which we at first received them. You see that at first "she trembled exceedingly." Besides the natural fear of a ghost or spirit which she had in common with all men: besides the virtuous fear of something shameful, in the sight of God and man, which the angel's words seemed to forebode; there was, perhaps, a momentary shrinking from the

high vocation God had marked out for her, as an eminence too great and perilous for her. Just as we have heard of martyrs shrinking at first from the stake, and yet afterwards going bravely through the fiery trial, when they saw it to be plainly God's will that they should. And so it *ever* is. When any strange thing happens to man, whether it be joyful or terrible, there arises at first a confusion and bewilderment which is very much akin to fear. We do not understand what has happened, or is happening to us, and a sense of awe irresistibly steals over us, until we have time to gather up our bewildered faculties, and decide upon our course of action. And what the strange apparition of an angel was to the Blessed Virgin Mary, that also are God's providential dealings to every one of his servants. They are God's angels sent to you, either to comfort you when you are in sorrow, or to warn and arouse you when you are willingly allowing yourself in any course of sin, or to bid you bear your cross when you are sinking into habits of fleshly ease and indulgence, or sometimes only to keep you waiting and expectant for the coming events which God is preparing, for the trial of your faith,

and the maturing of all that is best and holiest in your nature. And oh ! my brother, it may be that in this I am speaking not merely at random. It may be that some such angel has appeared to one of you. You know not why or wherefore it has been sent. You know not why you have been plunged into deep sorrow ; why you have, by dangerous illness, been brought face to face with death ; why you have lost your property by unforeseen disaster, and been made to suffer severe privation ; or why you have been bereaved of those who were unutterably dear to you. But at least be sure of this, that the thing which makes you stand thus amazed and sorrowful is God's visitation. He, indeed, does not *contrive* evil or sorrow for any man. It is Satan who does that. But yet He deprives it of its sting, and in it *visits* you, and makes that which is very bitter in itself become a wholesome medicine to your soul. It is His angel, sent to you by One who loves you far too well to inflict a single needless pang. And though you know not this fully now, yet you shall know it hereafter. Do not strive merely to forget it ; but do not regard it, either, as an inconsolable evil. He who suffered you to be wounded has in

His own hand the herbs of healing. This providence may have made you tremble, but He has other providences in store, which will make plain all His dealings with you, even those which are the strangest. Do not drive away the thought of your trouble, then, so much as *keep it in your heart*, looking for the time when God will prove to you, so that you cannot resist the proof, that the angel He sent, and at whose presence you were troubled, was indeed an angel of blessing.

But we must not forget the other things which happened to the Blessed Virgin Mary, which also she kept, and pondered in her heart.

The manner in which her cousin Elizabeth addressed her, under the guidance of God's Spirit, must also have seemed very strange: "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb; and whence is this, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" Who or what was she that she should have been singled out in this manner; she, a poor and humble girl, with no prospect but that of a humble, hard-working life before her? Had she been even such an one as Elizabeth, the wife of a Priest of God, there was something blessed in *that*. But, the daughter of

homely villagers, reared in a cottage, the espoused wife of Joseph the Carpenter—her career might, indeed, in these circumstances, be useful and honourable, as that of every poor man's wife or daughter who lives in the reverent fear of God, may also be; but what was there, in a lot like hers, to single her out as one "*Blessed among women?*" And what, too, was that mysterious name by which Elizabeth called her—the "*Mother of my Lord?*" All this was passing strange. How would the words of the angel then rush back upon her mind: "Therefore also that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." And then there happened a new thing, which was almost stranger than all that had gone before; when, rapt in ecstasy, and speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, she broke forth into that splendid song of praise, which, in our own Church, is sung by many thousand worshippers from week to week: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for behold, from henceforth, all generations shall call me blessed."

By angel visits, then; by prophecy; by the

inward operation of God's spirit, lifting up her soul in heavenly ecstasy ; by these signs and wonders God had signified to her that hers was no common calling, and that the child of whom she at length became the joyful mother, was no common child. And still one other sign was vouchsafed, when the glory of the unseen heavens was revealed to the shepherds as they watched their flocks by night on the plains of Bethlehem, and the voices of angels told them One was born in the city of David, who was Christ the Lord, and in whom would be made manifest "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good-will towards men." It was then that we are told, while others wondered at those things which were said to them by the shepherds, as something quite unheard-of, Mary—whose mind was now, after all she had herself already seen, in a state of reverent expectation—"kept all these things and pondered them in her heart."

Now, my brethren, it is quite true that the things to which she thus clung were great and wonderful, and yet they are nothing to the things God has made known to us. If an angel were to appear to any one of you, that would be nothing

to the mystery which God has actually revealed to you, after hiding it from ages and generations who felt their need of it sorely—I mean the mystery of Our Lord's Incarnation. Indeed, *all* the things that had happened to Mary, the mother of Jesus, may be said to have happened to you; for you have read how the angel spoke to her, and the account which God's most holy Word has given of all those strange and blessed events which had thrown her into such a state of anxious, awe-stricken thought. And prophets, too, you have heard; for have not the words of one of them been read to you once more in the First Lesson for this Morning's Service? And have not your hearts burned within you oftentimes while listening to the glorious words of Isaiah, while now he has denounced your sins, or now has borne witness of God's eternal and unfailing love, or now again has sketched, with many a glowing colour, the blessedness which shall attend our Redeemer's final triumph over unrighteousness and every kind of sorrow? But oh! my friends, to words speaking yet more directly home to your hearts than all these have you often listened, even the words of divine comfort which your Blessed

Saviour spake on earth, of which His Church, as the witness and keeper of Holy Writ, has safely preserved the record, that in them you might find life, and to which God forbid that you should ever come to listen with hearts untouched and unsoftened. Yes, God "who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past to the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us by His Son."

Through long ages men had felt the misery of their separation from God, and hoped the time might yet come when they might again be at one with Him, holding direct intercourse with Him, as did Adam and Enoch; and yet, in the midst of these thoughts, which, indeed, were rather the heavings of strong desire than the confident expectation of lively hope, there rose up in their hearts dismal fears of God's anger, which drove them farther and farther away. And so it was that, at the time these things happened to Mary, they did not seem at all nearer what they had been hoping for, but rather farther away than they had been hundreds of years before; and it is very doubtful indeed whether Mary herself knew, when her infant was born, that this was

verily and indeed the Eternal Word made flesh. Nay, rather, it is almost certain she did *not* know it until many years had passed away, and His resurrection made many of the darker passages in her wonderful experience very plain and intelligible. And thus you see what deeper cause we have to “keep these things,” than even she had, and to “ponder them in our hearts;” the things to be kept are now so much greater, more numerous, and more solemn. Brethren, whatever other truth you hold lightly, hold this firmly; keep it in your heart and ponder it well. Think always how God has revealed Himself in Christ, and then you will not make so many mistakes about God, and His intentions towards you. Think that not only is the Lord on high “very God of very God,” but that He is also “very man of very man,” and thus you will not fall into the mistake of thinking that He regards you only when engaged in direct acts of prayer and praise. Your religion will not be a thing for Sunday only, but for every day. My brother, He knows what you are, and what your whole life is, and in every transaction of it is very nigh to you, if you would only believe it to your comfort. Not a pang

your body feels, never a moment when you are ready to sink down in weakness or fatigue, not a harsh word spoken to you, which wounds your feelings, not a single grief or disappointment which makes you feel miserable, that does not cry out to Him most loudly for help, that is not acknowledged by Him as such ; for He remembers how He toiled on His way on earth, often hungry, thirsty, in pain and weariness, and vainly seeking rest ; how He had to bear the cruel scorn of man, and was racked with pain upon the cross, and made trial of the very deepest and loneliest sorrows that ever were endured on earth. And all this He did that He might be thoroughly a *fellow man*, that each one of you might know Him for your Saviour and Helper, not only in the soul's last extremity, at death, but in *every* extremity of life ; and that thus that religion which consists in a willing thankful sense of God's presence and acceptance of His help, and trust in His Fatherly love, might enter into the very heart and centre of your being. He did it that He might be with you, not, as the conduct of too many might lead us to suppose, when you are least, but when you are most, *like yourself*, when you are grappling

with the sternest realities of life, when you are least under the dominion of formality and self-consciousness. Yet, brethren, that Christ the Word was "made flesh," will be no help to you, unless you keep that truth with you *ever*, and believe it with the uttermost conviction of your heart, and ponder it well. It is worth while thus to ponder it. It is worth while for a poor, hard-working man to know that his life, in all its common cares or trials, is thus closely linked with that of Christ the Lord; it is worth while to look at it in all its bearings, just as, when anything joyful in your temporal lot has happened to you, you are not content with merely seeing that it is true, and so thinking no more about it, but come back to it again and again, finding yourself thinking about it when you are at your work, or wherever you are, every other thought that rises up in your mind, somehow at last verging round to the one joyful subject, and suggesting some new feature of happiness in it that you had not considered before.

And one reason why you should specially ponder this truth is, that it will greatly help you in your fight with sin. Do you think, if you thoroughly

believed it, and carried it about with you habitually, you could, with the thought of it in your heart, commit any of those coarse and degrading sins which are but too familiar in every parish in England? Thus closely linked with Christ, could you, as a man regenerate in Him, do those things which are abhorrent to His very nature,—offend against His truth, by lying or paltry evasions and deceits one with another,—offend against His love, by hatreds, jealousies, heartburnings, one with another,—offend against His purity, by gluttony, by drunkenness, by fornication, or by any other of those forms of fleshly sin on which God, in His word and by His providence, has so emphatically pronounced His curse?

First think of the things God has done for you, and what they were done for, and then look home at yourselves. Think of the Son of God on earth, in our nature, living for us, dying for us, rising again to give us also a share in His rising. Think of the Holy Spirit, continuing to testify of Him, restraining you from sin, striving with you and leading you, and making it impossible for you to be happy in transgressing the boundary of God's law. Think of His Church established on earth,

and the ordinances through which that Spirit is still present amongst us—Prayer and Praise lifting up your hearts in devotion to your God and Father, from whom every good gift cometh down—Baptism calling you out of the world, and giving you a place in God's family, and pledging you to a purity of life answerable to your calling—the Holy Communion solemnly repeating that pledge, testifying against you if you have forgotten it, and helping you forward if you are still earnestly desirous to keep it. Then, think of the spiritual teaching, not only of the Holy Scriptures, but of God's ordinary course of Providence, the ministry of affliction to chasten you, and of sickness to make you feel your helplessness, and of frequent disappointments to break the pride of your hearts, and make you humble, heavenly-minded, child-like disciples. These are the things—the many great and wondrous things—you have to ponder in your hearts. And now, look home upon yourself and your common life. Do you live at all as if these things were true? Think whether your life is altogether such as a man's ought to be to whom God has been calling by these various wonders. We should have thought it a very

shameful thing if Mary, after being thus singled out, as the "Blessed among women," to become the Mother of our Lord, had forgotten her calling, and lived like one entirely wrapt up in earthly cares. But it will be almost a more shameful thing in *us*, if we treat those things which God has done in our behalf as if they were nothing worth ; and, while pondering much and often the things which are seen and temporal, never ponder at all God's gracious *spiritual* dealings with us, or do so but seldom. May you so ponder them during this week, my brethren, that you may find Christ by your side, in your every-day work, by the wayside and in your homes, making all impure words and deeds very shameful in your eyes ; making you more conscientious in all the duties you owe to masters, to servants, to children, to neighbours ; and helping you to live as becomes those whom Christ has called, to "follow Him in lowliness, meekness, and charity."

SERMON III.

THE SORROWFUL SEARCH FOR CHRIST.

(2nd Sunday after Epiphany, 1853.)

“Behold, thy father and I have sought thee, sorrowing.”—
St. Luke ii. 48.

THE season of Epiphany, as you were told last Sunday, specially declares the wonderful manner in which Christ was manifested, not to a few men, here and there, but to all men of every nation under Heaven. And you who devoutly use your Prayer-books as well as your Bibles, will generally find something instructive in the choice of the portions of Scripture in the Prayer-book, in ushering in the various seasons of the Church. Through those selected in the Holy Gospels for Epiphany, you will find one idea mainly running. It is the exhibition of the Man, Christ Jesus, in

all the fulness of His wondrous nature,—the exhibition of Him to us, by inspired and heaven-guided hands, in all His various aspects—as child, as man, mingling in the joyful gathering of the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee,—as the world’s loving Saviour, healing alike the Jewish leper and the Gentile servant, lying sick of the palsy,—as the Lord of created things, and the Master of devils, bidding away a great storm with a word, and delivering the two men possessed with devils, whom he met coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce,—as the King, not only of heaven, where all are pure, and no enemy can come, but also of this world, where an enemy is ever busily at work, sowing tares in His field,—and finally as the Son of Man our Judge, who will right the cause of them that suffer wrong, and cause all the tribes of the earth to mourn, who have been fancying that righteousness is not the mightiest power in the universe, that they might trample it under foot, and yet never see the righteous Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven to teach them a different lesson.

Between these two extremes of Christ as a helpless little child, and Christ as the Righteous

and Almighty Judge, whose presence among them all men, sooner or later, shall somehow be made to acknowledge—there must undoubtedly occur many wonderful events; but they have all this one object of exhibiting Him to us in the entirety of His nature, as the Son of God who once dwelt upon this earth, as the Son of Man who has now passed into the heavens.

It was very wonderful to read, as we did no long time since, of Him whose was to be so great a work, receiving, as a little babe, the homage of the wise men who came from far, saying they had seen His star in the east; and to know, as we do know, that that was not the mere form and semblance of a human infant which they saw lying in the stable, but that He was really and truly an infant, even as he was afterwards really and truly a full-grown man.

But the incident recorded in the second chapter of St. Luke, from which my text is taken to-day, reveals Jesus to us in both His characters, as human and divine. You remember the beautiful story told by that Evangelist—how Joseph and Mary had gone together to Jerusalem, as was the custom of them both, to observe the feast of the

Passover, taking with them Jesus, then a boy of twelve years old ;—how, after the feast was over, they turned homewards, but soon missed Him from the company ;—how they sought Him in all likely places, and all in vain, until at last they found Him in the temple listening to the doctors there, and asking them questions ;—how, when they told Him of their sorrow, and reproached Him for dealing thus with them, he asked if they “ wist not that He must be about His father’s business ? ”—and yet how, notwithstanding this, he went down with them to Nazareth, and was subject unto them. At the age of twelve, Jewish boys were usually led by their parents to Jerusalem and the temple, there for the first time to unite in the solemn rites of the Paschal season, to become, as it was termed, “ sons of the law,” that is, to assume their proper position as children of the Covenant, and to make the law, and all it required of them, thenceforward their peculiar study. It is at such an age that the mystery of a higher and an unseen life begins to be really felt, and that the instructions of teachers and pastors are at length becoming more thoroughly

1

understood ; they were therefore, like our own children when about to be trained in the needful preparation for Confirmation, made to enter on a course of more regular instruction than that heretofore pursued. You may imagine what an event this would be in the life of a child brought up in the country, far from Jerusalem. Their case was widely different from that of our own children, who are admitted into the Church by Baptism, and are not detained from the courts of the Lord's House during their childhood. As soon as they are able even partially to understand what is done here, they are brought hither to join with those who "make a joyful noise unto the rock of their salvation." They see other children given to God, and signed with the holy sign of the young soldier of Christ ; they witness, from time to time, the confirmation of those who dare openly to take the Lord for their God ; and though they do not actually see the Holy Communion administered, yet the place where it is taken and received is there before their eyes. They can read the gracious words which there are said to Christ's faithful people ; and from week to week they go

to the House of God in company with those to whom they are bound by dearest ties, there to join in the general confession of sin, to be warned against the dangerous ways of this world, and to have their thoughts and affections directed towards that blessed Saviour who looks upon them with favour as the lambs of His flock.

But in all this the experience of our children differs widely from that of the Israelites. They who dwelt in a town like Nazareth, had never seen the temple; on the Lord's own House their eyes had never looked; its sacred courts their youthful feet had never trodden; and though, doubtless, from their parents they often heard of all that was done there, of the mercy-seat and its cherubim, of the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt-offering, of the daily and the yearly sacrifices—above all, of the slain lamb and the Passover feast, and God's mercy to their firstborn therein shown forth; yet all this would but heighten their wonder at things so often heard of but never seen. In the scene which Jerusalem and the temple presented, when, at that yearly festival, there were gathered together devout Jews, dwellers in every nation under heaven, there would be

many new and interesting objects, well calculated to captivate the young imagination of boys looking on it for the first time. The capital itself, the multitudes of people, and above all, the gorgeous temple services, and their own solemn entrance on a maturer stage of life, would excite in them quite new feelings of wonder and devotion.

Such was the scene, and such were the circumstances under which Jesus came, with His mother and her husband Joseph, at this time to Jerusalem. And in His appearance here there is perhaps not less of mystery than in His appearance in the manger at Bethlehem. For here we see him—young as he was—acting for the first time under a consciousness (to which His mother and Joseph were strangers) that He was sent into the world on a great and solemn business, of which those around Him had no idea, yet in which they had each one a deep personal interest. It is very mysterious to read, as we do here, of the boyhood of Christ. For in the incident we are considering we see no proof of a more advanced knowledge than that common to other boys ; and yet we see the consciousness of a calling and work higher

than that assigned to any other being in the world. "The child grew," and that not in body alone, but He "waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom;" He "increased, not only in stature, but in wisdom also, and in favour with God and man." He was found in the temple asking questions of the doctors, because He had that consciousness of His higher mission which marked Him out from the rest of the world, yet asking them also because He needed to ask them—because, as a boy, He had not reached His full stature either of body or mind—and because, as one very man of very man, He would gain knowledge by those ordinary means required of every man. This was part of the needful preparation for His work which He would not neglect. It was but one among many instances of that submitting of His will to His Father's in which He was perpetually making ready to bear His cross—but one step in that long course of humiliation whose final act was done on Calvary. In the same spirit it was, that immediately afterwards He went down with His parents, and was subject unto them.

But now let us turn from the scene presented in the temple, to look for a moment at the sorrow

of Joseph and Mary, and to inquire into its causes. It is Mary here who speaks, and it is at least probable that in her sorrow there was somewhat of self-reproach. The prodigies which accompanied the birth of Jesus were such, that she at least could not doubt that an extraordinary career awaited her son, and that a superhuman work had been given Him to do. Over such an invaluable life she might tax herself with not having watched with sufficient care. It is very easy to understand how she might have lost sight of Him, and yet suppose Him to be in the company; for in the East it is usual for persons travelling to form themselves into large companies or caravans. It is quite possible, therefore, that Mary may have committed Him to the care of some relative of the same company, while yet in Jerusalem, and thus she might have considered her charge safe, though not under her own eye.

Yet though this be so, she would no doubt be disposed to judge herself very hardly, and to accuse herself bitterly of neglect on learning that her son was nowhere to be found. She began to seek Him at once, and with much sorrow of heart. "Thy father and I," said the Mother of Jesus,

“have sought thee, sorrowing.” As regards Joseph, we know too little to understand the nature of his grief—whether it was personal to himself, or only on account of Mary’s manifest distress. All we know of him is, that he was a just man, who religiously obeyed the commands of God; and we have at least two conspicuous proofs of his obedience and faith, in giving to Jesus the name prescribed by the angel, and in fleeing to Egypt to save the child from King Herod. It was probably no slight trial to be called thus to go into a foreign country, such as Egypt, far from his home, and his ordinary means of livelihood; but in this we see the same conscientiousness and right principle which marks the rest of his conduct. He was probably a practical God-fearing man, with whom obedience to the will of God had become an unvarying rule of life. Yet we may believe, at the same time, that he had little of that meditative turn of mind which would have led him to treasure up the early wonders and promises in connection with the birth of Jesus, as Mary did when she “kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.” His sorrow would probably be little more than the natural

sorrow of one who had held daily and endearing intercourse with an attractive child, on hearing that he was lost. From the words, "Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing," we must therefore only conclude that both felt sorrow, not that the sorrow of both was the same, either in kind or in intensity. Into Mary's grief there would necessarily enter some elements personal to herself, and these mainly of a religious character. It would partake largely of self-reproach, either at the thought of her immediate neglect, or at the remembrance of her religious state for a long time previous to this. For it may be, even, that she had forgotten that Christ was not only her son, but also the Son of God—had forgotten, in a word, that a superhuman interest attached to his life. That she should so have forgotten, after the clear message of the angel, may seem almost incredible, yet we should consider how long ago that message had been given, and what manner of life hers had been in the interval. Twelve long years had intervened, and these not years of silken comfort and ease, but probably of unceasing contest with the ills of life—twelve years certainly spent in the lot of poverty, amid all the cares and priva-

tions peculiar to that lot. The wear and tear of life, and the ceaseless struggle for daily bread, if it did not efface all remembrance of the past, would provide in the present sufficient, and sufficiently painful, matter of thought, to render these remembrances more and more indistinct, as time passed by. At first, indeed, she pondered them in her heart; but years rolled on and nothing occurred to throw light on the mystic sayings which preceded the birth of Jesus, or the miraculous events which accompanied it. They returned from Egypt, and no one either threatened the life of the child, or attached peculiar interest to it. No more Herods trembled at the name of Christ, and no more wise men came to do Him homage. Meanwhile each day brought its hard fight for life, and its fresh experience of privation. If, at length, then, Mary came to recall the wondrous things that happened to her in the early days of her espousal, as one recalls a long-past dream, and at last ceased to think of them at all, it can hardly be considered unaccountable. Perhaps she even steadfastly avoided such remembrances, under the idea that they would unsettle her mind and unfit her for the duties that lay directly before her.

But now that her child was lost to her, she could see much in this that was seriously wrong. Her faith in God was no faith, if mere delay could prevail on her to cast it away. The words of the angel to herself, the inspired salutation of Elizabeth, the visit of the shepherds, the adoration of the wise men, the blessing of Simeon and Anna in the temple, the heavenly warning to flee into Egypt—she would think of these things now, and remember how little precious she had lately thought them. It may be, therefore, that her sorrow was of a deep, mysterious, and very mingled character—more than the sorrow of a mother over the child whom she had borne. Perhaps there was in it the consciousness of neglected duty or slumbering faith; perhaps there mingled in it bitter remembrances of a considerable period of her past life, in which she had been living in a partially unbelieving state—living like any ordinary woman, not like one blessed among women—blessed above all women. And thus she would seek Him sorrowing—sorrowing because He whom she loved with all a mother's love, could nowhere be found—sorrowing, it may be, because she had forgotten her high vocation, and the heavenly

nature of her charge, and overwhelmed with the heavy fear that the blessedness which God had promised her as the mother of Christ her Lord, she would now no longer be permitted to enjoy.

Now, my brethren, a very natural and obvious use of this subject for our own profit, would be to ask each one of you whether you have been walking on your onward way through life, supposing that Christ had been in the company, yet not sure of it, not thinking much about it, not caring to know whether He really is or no, until something has happened to convince you that He is not. This is the most obvious of all the teachings of this incident; and though I would not confine myself to this, in what I have to say to you of a practical kind, yet let none of us fail to ask and answer this question for ourselves. Let us see that we be living in the daily habit of communing with Him; and if we cannot realize His presence, let us seek him diligently, though it be with sorrow, and not rest until we are again sure of His present sympathy and His helpful aid.

But though it be very important to satisfy ourselves of this, yet there are other questions arising out of this subject, which I would also

press upon you. All Christian mothers are in some sort like Mary, to whom the holy child Jesus was committed as a sacred charge. The power of God was with Him, indeed, so that nothing could harm Him, otherwise than as He chose to submit to harm : but Mary, who as yet was only pondering wonderingly all things that had happened, did not know this ; and on her, so far as she knew, rested the whole responsibility for His safety. In this respect, she represents every woman to whom God has committed a child, to be guarded from evil, spiritual and temporal, and to be trained in the ways of holiness and happiness. We may bless God that the heedlessness of cruel mothers—for is not every mother cruel who wantonly suffers her child to stray from God and happiness?—will not *certainly* destroy the souls of their children ; for there is another power with them, even the power of the good Spirit of God, who shields them round with an invisible defence, from many an evil : yet, inasmuch as the parent knows not how, or when that power is exerted in their behalf ; inasmuch as she knows that it will never be so exerted as to destroy the freedom of their individual choice ;

inasmuch as she knows that it is she, and she alone, who can by God's blessing, so bend the will and raise the desires of her child to holy objects, as to incline him to choose the good and hate the evil—she feels, or ought to feel, that she is responsible to God for her child's safety, not here only, but hereafter ; and woe be to her if she neglect that charge ! As she sows, that will she also reap ; and she will not have to wait long for the bitter fruits. It may be only neglect of which she is guilty ; or it may be her own sins that she sees reproduced in the generation after her, and thus finding her out, to her confusion ; but, however it be, it will be an awful thing for her if she ever awaketo the conviction that she has *lost* her child. It will be with bitter sorrow that she will seek him : who knows whether she will ever find him ?

And as the sorrowful Mary, seeking her neglected charge, represents all mothers who have neglected the charge committed to them ; so the child Christ, thus early about His Father's business, represents every Christian child. For all, however young, are, like Him, *sent* into the world. They have a mission and a calling. That

calling is, to do the will of their Father, who has sent them. And the will of their Father they assuredly will do, according to their knowledge and understanding, and belief of who and what that Father is. If they have been taught that they are not the children of grace, but of wrath; that God is only their enemy; and that until some sudden change happens they are and must continue children of the devil—no wonder if they act upon that teaching. When their sorrowing parents find them engaged—oh, how differently from the youthful Jesus!—breaking their very hearts by their bad ways, might they not reproach them in the very words of the Saviour, though with a shockingly different application: ‘Wist ye not that I must be about my father’s business? I am doing nothing but what I have been taught from my very infancy, that I must do until I cease to be a child of the devil—until I become what I cannot make myself become—a child of God.’ And in reference to this result, it matters very little whether they have been taught this by precept or only by example. On the other hand, what a blessing those children are to their parents who are

brought up really and truly according to the beginning made in their Baptism! If they learn really to obey the calling made to them to be obedient children of God, what a comfort to anxious parents to know that whether in their sight or out of their sight, they are, in imitation of their Saviour, about their Father's business. And as that loving Father's first requirement of them is, that they be ready to give up their own will, so also their earthly parents will find them more willing to subject themselves to their parental rule and guidance than if they had never acknowledged any such call. Though always anxious to do their Heavenly Father's work, yet they will strive, while doing it, to be imitators of Him who went down to Nazareth with His parents and was subject unto them. Do you who are young never forget this.

Brethren, from the sorrow of Mary, and the incident here recorded of the boyhood of our Saviour, I have sought to enforce, on two classes amongst us, very plain duties. But let us apply the same rule to every other charge God has intrusted to us. We who are pastors of Christ's flock have need to lay it to heart most deeply,

lest we be left hereafter to seek in sorrow what we should have guarded and tended while we had the opportunity. Relatives, on whom Christ has laid it as a solemn charge that they be kindly affectioned one to another, should take heed betimes to their fulfilment of this duty, lest hereafter, when death has caused gaps and separations among them, they too sorrowfully seek the lost opportunity of doing it. And since every one of us has a vocation and ministry, every one will find, if he search diligently for it, something in which it becomes Him to take more earnest heed. A timely carefulness will save us from many a sorrowful and unavailing search.

SERMON IV.

JACOB AND ESAU.

(2nd Sunday in Lent, 1854.)

“ And Esau said, Is not he rightly called Jacob ? for he hath supplanted me these two times : he took away my birthright, and behold now he hath taken away my blessing.”—Genesis xxvii. 36.

I suppose no one has ever read the miserable story contained in the First Lesson for to-day, without very painful feelings of perplexity. Jacob, as one of the patriarchs, appears to us in a venerable position, in the Old Testament history ; and yet we find him here engaged in an action, the vileness and meanness of which it is impossible for any words to exaggerate. It is true that good eventually came out of it ; but good sometimes comes out of things which we know to be very bad in themselves ; this must not, there-

fore, lead us to mistake the character of the proceeding itself. Any man who should now-a-days behave as Jacob is represented in this transaction to have behaved to his brother Esau, would be denounced in plain terms as a swindler and a liar. Nor is this the only occasion on which he seems to have been wanting, not merely in high principle, but even in the lower notions of what is right and decent which prevail among many who make no profession of obedience to God at all. He had already on one occasion most ungenerously taken advantage of his brother's extreme want to obtain from him his birthright; he now, by trickery and falsehood, defrauds him of the elder brother's blessing; in his after-life, in Padan-Aram, we find him engaged in a perpetual contest of cunning with his uncle Laban; on his subsequent meeting with Esau, after twenty years' absence, his bearing is as abject and cowardly, as before it had been mean and ungenerous; and, on the whole, there are few characters in Scripture of whom so many things are mentioned which shock our moral sense. For it can never be otherwise than shocking to meet with unworthy and untruthful conduct in one who

7

seems yet to have been distinguished by special marks of divine favour. I daresay those of you who have thought about the matter have already often asked the question, how it came to pass that Jacob, who did so many things that were positively bad and mean, was preferred by God to Esau, whose faults were only those of heedlessness and thoughtlessness.

From the facts regarding the early life of the two brothers, there is much which might have led us to prefer the character of the elder, who in Scripture is condemned; and to condemn the character of the younger, who in Scripture is represented as honoured and blessed. On the few occasions in which Esau appears prominently before us, there is a frank open-heartedness about him which is very engaging; nor does there appear, on the face of the narrative, any distinct evidence of such wickedness as should have lost him the favour of God and his father Isaac. There is, indeed, much of haste and recklessness in his conduct, there is a total want of prudence and foresight; and perhaps, also, considerable impatience of restraint. But he is precisely the kind of man who is always admired by the mul-

titude—a man of spirit, acting always at the bidding of sudden impulses, which are in general not base or ungenerous, with a rough tenderness towards his old father, an unsuspecting frankness in his dealings with his brother, and a general rashness and impetuosity in his every word and action, which cannot fail to engage for him the liking of the reader. There are hardly any of us who can resist the temptation to admire and applaud—often very thoughtlessly and inconsiderately—mere personal attractions and spirited actions. And though Esau's character has a darker side, yet the general impression in his favour leads us to put the most charitable construction on his more doubtful acts. The language he held towards Jacob, on finding how he had cheated him of his blessing, was bloody and violent; but this, in a man of his general rashness and outspokenness, might be nothing more than a sudden outbreak of angry passion in the disappointment of his affection, and the bitter sense of wrong, which, however it struck terror into the timid soul of the guilty Jacob, was yet in reality forgotten as soon as uttered. And certainly, when Esau again appears, it is in

a character most noble and princely, forgetting all the wrongs his brother had done him, and receiving with manly tenderness the humiliating advances of his supplanter. With this favourable impression of Esau's character, as we read the history, we cannot but sympathise in his indignation at the low fraud practised on him, and in the anguish of his cry: "Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father!" But yet, in the estimate thus formed, there must be somewhere a mistake; for certainly the judgment pronounced on him in Scripture is not only not favourable, but is actually and positively adverse. Beneath the family plots in which we find the family of Isaac engaged there is to be seen a deeper choice, on the part of God, by which Esau was deliberately judged unworthy to hand down the promised blessings of the covenant to the generation that was to come after him. Now, is any reason for this revealed to us?

First, let us look at his earliest punishment—the loss of his birthright. On a certain evening, after a long day's hunting, he came home ready to sink with fatigue, and needing the immediate

support of food. But no food was to be had, except some pottage of Jacob's, which he ungenerously refused to give him, except at the price of his birthright. Now, it has often been supposed that his sin lay in preferring the immediate gratification of food to the more lasting privileges belonging to him in right of his birth, as heir of the child of promise; but we must not fail to take into account the literal circumstances of the case. There might be much truth in what Esau said, that, for want of food, he was in danger of dying. In those days, they did not live in houses, but in tents, and there no large supply of food can be kept; so that if, as was very likely, Esau had come home unsuccessful from his hunting, he might be saying no more than the simple truth, when he exclaimed, "Behold, I am at the point to die; and what profit shall this birthright do to me?" If Jacob had had any heart at all, he would not have chosen such a moment to chaffer about the terms on which he would supply his brother's urgent need; but since he did so, and named his birthright as the price of his pottage, Esau's only choice lay between that and famishing. The sin for which he was passed by must have

been something more serious and more habitual than this.

On the occasion of his second punishment—the loss of his blessing—his conduct immediately in connection with that was affectionate and kind, and therefore the sin for which he suffered must have gone long before. What that sin was St. Paul seems to hint at, in writing to the Hebrews: “Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birth-right.” Now the selling his birthright is not here alluded to as the thing in which his sin consisted, but is rather added by the way, as a fact which would remind the Hebrews of whom it was that he was speaking. It is the other term applied to him which shows us what his sin really was. It refers to that intermarrying with heathen nations which was forbidden to all of Abraham’s race, and which the Jews were always taught to look upon as uncleanness. Abraham, in sending his steward Eleazar to choose a wife for his son Isaac, said, “I will make thee swear, by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among

whom I dwell." And in later days this commandment was repeated: "When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee—thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them; neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods." Now, this was the express condition on which Isaac himself, as the Child of Promise, possessed the birthright rather than Ishmael; and it must have been well known in the family that it was the condition on which alone that birthright could be enjoyed. Bearing this in mind, it is important to read in the 26th chapter of Genesis: "Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith, the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath, the daughter of Elon the Hittite, which were a grief of mind to Isaac and to Rebekah." By this act Esau had cast himself forth from the privileges to the inheritance of which he was born; and thus it turns out that the trickery practised on Isaac was

not *all* on the side of Jacob and his mother. While Esau was working on the weakness, and indolence, and sensuality of Isaac, in the hope of gaining from him by this means that blessing his right to which he had long forfeited,—Jacob and his mother, distrustful of God, and thinking only of their own interest in His promises, set themselves to defeat this plot by another far more wicked. Yet, by whatever means the rejection of Esau was brought about, we are not to suppose that God cast him off merely because Jacob played a successful trick upon his father, but because Esau had long before, by a deliberate act of disobedience and uncleanness, given up his natural rights, and separated himself from God.

It appears, then, that Esau's character is not really so fine as we at first thought it. He had, I dare say, abundance of that indolent good-nature which often passes in the world for kindness and affectionateness of disposition; but yet we have seen that he could, when it served his purpose, trade on that to secure his own selfish ends. He was not without a warning voice within, bidding him give heed to God's commandment, and to turn away his eyes from following vanity; but

yet, though he knew that in so doing he was disobeying God, and grieving his parents, he did that which he knew to be wrong because he cared more for his own pleasures than for all else in the world. He had not, then, so fine a heart after all ! If he was not cruel, and malicious, and crafty, he seems to have been at least godless, and sensual, and self-indulgent.

And let me tell you, brethren, that it is almost a more dangerous thing to sin after the fashion of Esau, than after the fashion of Jacob ; for it is possible to gild over all our sins of the flesh with such good, fair-seeming names, that we easily forget the sinfulness of them : whereas craft and lies are despised by everybody. Every man commits Esau's sin who proceeds on the principle that the love of man for woman is a thing to be gratified at the bidding of every reckless impulse or passing fancy ; that in this he is not governed by those principles of Christian honour which he knows he ought to observe in other things ; that, in his affection for his fellow-creature, he is to be restrained by no regard to that higher law of purity towards God, and reverence towards her whom he has given for a help-meet, in conforming to which the love of

man is distinguished from the blind appetites of the beasts. Such is the fatal facility we possess in transmuting the most precious gifts of God into metal of a base and worthless sort, that that love which was given to call out the very highest powers and noblest purposes of man—endurance, self-denial, devotion, and manly self-restraint—is constantly being perverted from its proper nature, to minister only to his lowest and most sordid passions ; and cases are every day occurring around us, in which men cheat themselves with the notion that they are inspired by love to others, to a course of conduct which reveals but too plainly the naked truth—that they are the mere slaves of their own selfish lusts. And it is true of such persons, that, like Esau, they are for one morsel of meat selling things far more precious. There can be no love to man, any more than there can be true love to God : nor can any of its precious blessings be enjoyed ; unless it be sanctified by purity of heart, and a spirit of chivalrous self-sacrifice. And, though this is a subject on which it is difficult to speak in public, yet I do gladly avail myself of the opportunity thus afforded me to warn you, that all love which is real, whether it be love to

God or love to man or woman, will first show itself by disposing you to sacrifice somewhat of your own inclinations. If I see a young man, on profession of love to a fellow-creature, dragging her with him into the sin of uncleanness, and into the shame and wretchedness that follow on that sin, I know that his profession must be a lie, and that he loves his own lusts better than everything else in the world. And oh ! it is a burning shame, and a foul disgrace, that amongst us who have been baptized into Christ's Church, and have forsworn all the defilements of the flesh, this sin should again and again occur. Oh, let us pray to God that this disgrace may be wiped away. Mothers, watch more anxiously over your children, and be more in earnest in your endeavours to strengthen them in their vow, against all the sinful lusts of the flesh. But this you can never effectually do unless you seek to inspire them with that love to Christ against which impure affections and desires of all kinds can never maintain their ground.

And as for you, Men and Brethren, let not this sin be once named among you. As the Epistle for this day has again warned you : " This is the

will of God, even your sanctification . . . that ye should abstain from fornication . . . for God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness." Give no heed to any one who would persuade you to underrate the magnitude of this sin, or who would encourage you in the belief that any natural qualities, however good and loveable, can compensate for lawlessness in the indulgence of your lusts. I know, indeed, how often men are content with a mere Esau-like goodness, an easy, indolent good-nature; but I know also that this miscalled good-nature is often found to be nothing better than a heartless selfishness, and to be quite consistent with acts of the greatest cruelty and cowardice to others. But you, brethren, as God has put in the heart of each one of you a witness which tells you when you are acting like a true and brave man, and when you are acting like a false and cowardly slave, listen to that voice, and let your life be a perpetual struggle to obey the higher law of the spirit, and to set yourself free from that law of the flesh which would drag you down into all manner of ungodliness and impurity.

II. But if Esau's character was thus essentially

faulty, let us see what that was in Jacob's case which commended him to the Divine favour. This case is considerably more complicated than that of Esau. In order to understand it, we must remember that the grand aim manifest in all that God did, with reference to Abraham and his race, was that of keeping them entirely free from admixture with their idolatrous neighbours. Idolatry and impurity have always had a strangely intimate connection: the only hope, therefore, of saving men from the sins that were destroying them was, in preserving the relation between God as a Righteous Father, and that portion of mankind whom He had chosen as His witness. Now Jacob, however ill he understood the reason of this requirement, yet made no difficulty in complying with it. He was ready to forswear all union with idolaters; and therefore, though very unworthy in himself, he was to be preferred to one who, like Esau, seemed hardly to believe in the covenant, and indifferent to the privilege of transmitting its blessings. I can easily understand, however, that the temporal prosperity God bestowed on Jacob may have led some of you to suppose that there was something in *himself*, on account

of which God regarded Him with favour. And indeed it is very difficult, in thinking of the dealings of that Righteous and Holy One, to say how far He was anticipating that change in Jacob's character which his foreknowledge could perceive, before man could see any indication of it. Prosperity, however, is not a sure sign of God's favour. In it He calls to men, but calls to the wicked as well as the good. The work for which it was sent is known to God only: and I think we shall do better to regard Jacob's history as a long course of discipline, in which God was seeking, through the emptiness of outward prosperity, to lead him to ~~the~~ apprehension of spiritual realities—from thinking only of the gain accruing to himself from the birthright and the blessing, to think also of the solemn position in which they placed him, and the higher spiritual duties to which they pledged him. From the moment when he fled, in terror of his life, from the angry threatenings of his brother, we find him brought distinctly under this discipline. At that moment, he had reason to congratulate himself on the perfect success of his crooked scheme: and yet there was something within him which told him that he was

none the happier for it. Then it was, we are told, that weary and spirit-broken, he came to Bethel and lay down to sleep, with a stone for his pillow. The same voice of God which he had heard faintly in his waking thoughts now spoke to him more distinctly in his dreams, and showed him that there was something worth living for, far different from anything that he had imagined in his worldly plans of life. He saw "a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reaching to Heaven, and behold ! the angels of God ascending and descending upon it." God, too, spoke to him, and repeated in set form the promise He had made before to Abraham. And then Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not !" Words very solemn and true ! Yes, in a much wider sense than any he dreamt of, was God in that place. Not in the one particular spot alone in which he had sought bodily rest, but in the whole world—in the place where he had been thinking only of flocks, and herds, and corn, and wine, and worldly gain, and selfish sway and sovereignty. Many a time, in his future life, did he make the same discovery. In places which he was regarding only as a scene in which he might

labour to make himself rich, or snatch a brief repose for renewing that labour, he was again and again confronted by unexpected intimations of a higher order of things, to which he bore a mysterious but true relation. Gradually he learned to look upon outward things with a different eye, and the aspect of the world changed before him as he looked. He came to many a Luz, thinking only of refreshment and taking rest in sleep, and was there led, by God's spirit, into a deeper and holier rest, so that he found it a very Bethel—a house of God on earth.

It is not in a moment, however, that a man of earthly mind can arise to a true conception of spiritual truth; and though he thought himself in the House of God, and at the very Gate of Heaven, yet the accustomed habits of his mind clung to him even then; and we find him qualifying his vow to God with the characteristic condition that he should have bread to eat, and raiment to put on, and be brought back again to his father's house in peace. During the next twenty years, which he spent in Padan-Aram, the struggle between his two natures may well be believed never to have entirely ceased; though still, until

the time of his return home, with great wealth of cattle and goods, his character was far more worldly than we can bear to think of in one called to be a servant of God. Yet these twenty years seem to have been working on him, with increasing power, the same old conviction—certain to recur more and more frequently as men grow older—that, with all his success, there was something essential to his peace of which he was still in want. Again he is met by the angels of God, and reminded of the claims of that spiritual life to which the world has been steeling his heart. God was seeking to bring him to himself—his true self, his better self—and to deliver him from that earthly heart and soul or mind, which made him so slow to understand the real nature of his calling. Again and again this interference between him and his earthly heart is seen, but most strikingly of all, when left alone one night, wrestling with an angel, with whom he prevails, and from whom he obtains a blessing.

This, brethren, seems to me to be the turning point of his history. He is here described as having prevailed with God, which is, indeed, equivalent to saying that God has prevailed with him, that at last

the better nature—the nature which is in the image of God—has obtained the mastery, that now he has been led to set his heart more upon the blessing of God, for its own sake, than on all the earthly advantages for which alone he had once prized it. The language which the angel used to Jacob would have been quite out of place had he still been only the cold schemer he was of old: mysterious as it is, there is in it an undoubted reference to a real spiritual struggle, in which he had drawn nearer to God, and made fast his union with Him. And now, as he descends into the vale of years, and sorrow upon sorrow comes upon him—when Rachel is dead and Joseph is not, and for a time the beloved Benjamin, the child of sorrow, is in peril—he sees the events of his past life more and more clearly in their true character. The emptiness of his worldly schemes, and the reality and worth of his spiritual struggles come out with ever-increasing distinctness.

His whole character becomes more truly venerable, and the tone of grand and elevated feeling which pervades his farewell blessings to his sons, when about to leave the world, is in striking contrast to the coldness and craftiness of the spirit

which directed his earlier plans. It is evident that the lessons of his life have not been lost upon him, that he has become a new man, a better man, such a man as God meant him to be when He called him to the heritage of so many privileges and blessings.

Thus, brethren, we have in the history of these two men, a remarkable example of the manner in which the calling of God purifies the character of the basest and the meanest, and raises it to true goodness; of the manner in which those who acknowledge no such calling, gradually depart from goodness. How often have we seen men like Esau, amiable, spirited, generous, free from mean and paltry vices; and how often have we seen how their contact with the world, so far from mellowing their character, and making its finer qualities stronger and purer, has rather rubbed off its early beauty, and in old age left little trace of that youthful goodness of which once we might have hoped so much! On the other hand, we have had here presented to us a man in whose character naturally there seemed much that was far from noble or admirable; yet, when he had really begun to follow God, when the sense of the

higher claims of the unseen life had fairly taken possession of his soul, when in close communion with God he felt his whole heart laid bare, and the errors of his guilty life exposed to view, and was led in an agony of supplication to seek God's helpful Grace—we have seen how such a man, as he grew older, grew holier also; how all that was worst in him became feebler and feebler; and how, after the fretfulness and feverishness incidental to his life's pursuits, his soul returned unto its rest—that rest, that peace in God, which was its proper, its natural condition, and into which an unseen hand had long been guiding him.

And now, is this an old historical picture on which we have been gazing? Is it nothing more than that? Did God call to Jacob, and does He call to none who are now living on this earth? Ah, my brethren, this calling which Jacob had, and in yielding himself up to which such a wonderful change was wrought in him, you, also, have had uttered with tenfold greater clearness and impressiveness. Many a good angel has crossed your path, turning you aside from the sordid pursuit of this world's good, to understand the real character of that work which you have to do

on earth ; telling you that God is not afar off, but very near ; bidding you make haste to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him. If you have never in any dream seen a ladder let down from Heaven, and God's angels ascending and descending upon it, yet you have seen a sight far more wonderful and impressive. You have seen the mighty and loving Son of God come down from Heaven, and live, and suffer, and die, that by sacrifice of Himself your sins might be forgiven, and that, by the attraction of His Cross, He might draw you to the Father. You have seen the marvels of His outpoured Spirit, His Church planted in the world, His sacraments bearing everlasting witness of His love ; holy seasons, and warnings, and providences, calling you again and again to see and know that you are His redeemed ones, that you must therefore not live the same earthly and sensual lives as if you were still accursed, but must do continual battle with your sins. God is thus showing to you the very same thing which He showed to Jacob in his dream. This world in which you dwell, it is indeed the House of God, it is indeed the Gate of Heaven ! Oh, what a world, and what a life is this ! How environed with

solemnities, how grand its purpose, how perilous its temptations, how heavy its sorrows, yet how glorious its end ! To live in God's presence, to fight His battle, to do His work, and finally to enter on His joy, and all this, while encumbered with another, a lower nature, that "cares for none of these things"—*this* is your calling, brethren. He who is the light of men is pleading with you, and striving with you, as He pled and strove with Jacob, that you may never be suffered to sink down into the desolate belief that you have no part or lot in that great matter—of your part in which He has Himself, in His death and in His rising from the grave, powerfully assured you. Life, on any other principle, degenerates into a poor and sordid strife ; life, on this principle, becomes inexpressibly grand, and noble, and blessed. And because, though very grand, it is very difficult ; because our soul continually cleaves to the dust ; because, as we have to-day touchingly confessed, "we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves," oh, let us rejoice that God has not left us to ourselves, that He is on our side, that nothing on earth can cut us off from His aid, that if we ask Him He will conquer our

own bad hearts, and fix our wayward affections on Himself, that He will make us strong to do what is right, and that whatsoever we do in His name, He will cause it to prosper.

SERMON V.

CHRIST STILLING THE TEMPEST.

(4th Sunday after Epiphany, 1854.)

THE incident recorded in the Holy Gospel for this day continues the narrative at the point where we left it last Sunday.* We then saw our blessed Lord, after finishing His glorious Sermon on the Mount, performing His double act of healing on Jew and Gentile; already including both in the ministry of His grace, and throwing open the gates of His kingdom to all the nations of the earth. But, meanwhile, the gathering multitude who had been drawn together to hear His discourse and to witness His great works, increased to such an extent that He was fain to depart from them. They had already heard and seen all that was needful to convince them that He was the Christ,

* The sermon here alluded to was intended to have been included in this volume, but has been mislaid.

and any farther continuance among them would have tended to nothing but the whetting their appetite for new marvels. It was, however, far from His design to manifest Himself as a mere wonder-worker, to carry off the palm from all who had ever before sought to transcend the ordinary powers of nature, or to leave on their minds an impression of His being merely greater than all magicians the world had seen. The marvels which the Lord wrought are all to be viewed in connection with the *moral end* He had in view, in His endless activities of goodness ; and to have continued among the multitude, merely to prolong or intensify the astonishment they already felt, would have been at variance with the spirit of His habitual conduct. When, therefore, Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave commandment to depart unto the other side. You are to understand that He was at this time on the coast of the Sea of Galilee ; so that it was easy by crossing it to escape from them. But from the account which St. Mark gives us of the same events, it appears as if some among the crowd, unwilling thus to part from Him, followed Him even across the sea. For it is mentioned that

“there were also with Him other little ships.” These may, indeed, have been filled with the Lord’s own disciples; but it is very conceivable that others who had only lately seen His wonderful doings among men, may also have besought a place in them, in the hope of seeing and hearing yet more. And the exclamation made by those who witnessed the miracle he performed in stilling the raging waters, seems to imply that there were some men present who had not yet become His disciples, and were not prepared for such an act of sovereign might.

That it was an act of sovereign might, or that a real miracle was wrought, there can be no reasonable doubt. There have, indeed, been those who have read these Gospel histories in a doubting or unbelieving spirit, and are unwilling to admit that the deeds done by Christ were superhuman works at all. This act of stilling the tempest they look upon as no proof of higher power than that possessed by other men, but only of greater courage. They suppose that Our Lord’s calmness reassured the disciples; that by-and-bye the storm began to moderate; and that afterwards, exaggerating the danger

from which they had escaped, they came to ascribe this to the words of their Master, as its cause. But if plain men will simply read the Scripture narrative as they find it, they will find it impossible not to believe that here a real miracle was wrought. The words of our Saviour, in looking out upon the troubled waters and the angry and threatening heavens—"Peace, be still"—must have been addressed to some particular, actually-existing objects; and they could have been addressed to none but to the winds and waves themselves, or to the unseen powers by which they had been excited. Nor is it possible to suppose that the companions of Jesus were unreasonably frightened. They cried out, according to St. Matthew, saying, "Lord, save us: we perish;" according to St. Mark—"Master, carest thou not that we perish?" according to St. Luke—"Master, master, we perish." All the three evangelists describe the ship in which they were as fast filling with water; and the danger in which the disciples supposed themselves to be, as imminent beyond all question. And as these accounts are written for our instruction by those who were themselves disciples.

of Our Lord, we may be sure that their fears, which led them thus to cry out for help, were very well founded. Landsmen who do not know the appearance the sea presents when a gale is blowing, may easily be frightened even where no danger exists; but those who were with Him in the ship were not such as these. They were men who had been trained to the sea from their youth up. It was, moreover, an inland sea, and therefore more subject to violent and sudden gusts of wind than even the great ocean; and long experience must have taught them to understand these squalls, so as at least to know when there was danger and when there was none. Now there can be no question they thought there was danger in this one. They cry out to their Master, with a reality of terror and urgency of intreaty, which show that all the ordinary devices of seafaring men for weathering a gale were fast failing them, and that they believed a few moments more might see them struggling in the waters for their life. They were also far too well versed in the changes of weather on that sea on which, or about which, all their life had been spent, to mistake a gradual and natural lull in the storm for a miracle suddenly performed.

The scene which this narrative presents to us is a very impressive one ; how much more so must it have been to those who were themselves so personally interested in it ! We seem to see the cloud no bigger than a man's hand in the distance, gradually widening and nearing them ; the threatening gusts of wind now coming faster and more frequent ; the angry swirl of the water ; the rain and spray mingling with one another, and dashing blindingly over the wind-tost bark. As the waves mount higher, and the task of managing the ship becomes more difficult, we see at one end of the ship a group of men, eager, excited, alert, straining every nerve to make all fast,—looking down now and then, with sinking heart, into the trough of the sea,—watching the gradually rising waves as they sweep towards them,—turning again and again an anxious look towards the sky, to see if there is any hope of an abatement of the storm. On every face are the marked indications of strong excitement, anxiety, and resolution striving to master their increasing fears. But at the hinder part of the ship, a far different scene presents itself. One calm form is there, plunged in the deep still sleep which follows prolonged fatigue, the perfect rest of His features

in strange contrast to the passionate eager faces of those who are with Him in the ship, and to the signs of tumult and tempest by which they are surrounded. To His companions this calm must have appeared, in such circumstances, even unnatural.* They never seem for a moment to doubt His knowledge of their trouble or His power to help ; but, in the frenzy of their fear, they cry out, " Master, carest thou not that we perish ?" Very soon, however, it appeared that His calm was not merely the repose of unconscious sleep, but rather that of a strong nature, conscious of His power to subdue all dangers. When awakened from sleep, His face still wears the same look of grand repose. He hears nothing in the shrieking gale, and rattling cordage, and quivering timbers of the little ship ; He sees nothing in the aspect of the clouds, as they seem to muster and rally to the strife, or in the foaming sea, which threatens them with speedy destruction,—in this He hears and sees nothing to startle or dismay. But when He looks

* If I mistake not, this has been strikingly put by Mr. Trench in his " Notes on the Miracles." That book was not at hand when this sermon was written ; but I have no doubt that I am much indebted to it.

upon the cowering disciples, He can feel for the weakness in which He does not share; and in pity to them it is that, turning His face to the blast, He says to the roaring tempest, "Peace, be still." And then there is a great calm. In the sudden silence of that calm there must have been, to those who witnessed it, something even more awful than in the voice of the storm. Their first emotions would be those of simple, speechless wonder. Their next impulse would be, to express aloud the secret astonishment of their minds, as some of them actually did when they exclaimed, "What manner of man is this that even the winds and the waves obey Him?" He spake the word, and it was done. Who, among the Jews at least, could have witnessed this, and failed to revert in thought to the history of creation, in the narrative of Moses, when God Himself, by speaking His will, created all things that are? Who that did thus revert to that ancient history would fail to recognise Christ as the living Word of God, whose life-giving, order-creating power has been felt in all ages of the world? Who among them, who knew, as they all did know, the glorious Psalms of David, would fail at that

moment to think of one Psalm, in which precisely such a scene as that through which they had lately passed is described, and power such as that they had seen exhibited is ascribed to God only? "They that go down to the sea in ships, and occupy their business in great waters; these men see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep. For at His word the stormy wind ariseth; which lifteth up the waves thereof. They are carried up to the heaven, and down again to the deep; their soul melteth away because of the trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man: and are at their wit's end. So when they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, He delivereth them out of their distress. For He maketh the storm to cease, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad, because they are at rest, and so He bringeth them unto the haven where they would be."

Here, however, the cry was not to an unseen God, but to a present Saviour. Whether or not they who thus cried to Jesus understood Him to be very God of very God, they at once repair to Him as one who can deliver them even in this terrible extremity. And the manner in which

our Lord answers that appeal brings out more and more His real character. The chief object of His ministering to His disciples was, to lead them to that perfect trust in Him through which they would learn to dare all things in carrying on His work ; and, before He takes a single step for their relief, He reproaches them for their distrust : *O ye of little faith !* This want of faith may not at first appear, in reading this narrative. They did not distrust His power to help, otherwise they would not have called to Him for aid ; but there is a still graver defect implied in the words, "*carest thou not that we perish ?*" As if the good Shepherd who had come from afar to seek His wandering sheep ; who was willing, even, to lay down His life for them ; who had said concerning those who heard His voice, and followed Him, "*They shall never perish*"—as if *He* could ever cease to care, or as if they who had come to Him—the Life of men—could really perish !—as if storm, or tempest, or any earthly thing, could separate them from His love, His watchfulness, His Almighty protection ! As if, in His presence, and with Him for a sharer in what was about to befall them, any-

thing could happen which would justify this abject, unmanly fear! They had yet to learn, in the service of their Master, with its baptism of suffering, and its resistance unto blood, that though He suffers His servants to die, yet with Him by their side they cannot *perish*. The rebuke, therefore, which our Lord here gives them, is not so much to express His own displeasure as to recall them to their wavering conviction of His love—that He does *care*, and can never cease to care for those whom He has come to save. The miracle would not have been complete in its main purpose of revealing Christ more fully to His disciples and to the world, had this been left in doubt. But the manner in which he quells their fears, by bidding the winds be still, reveals Him yet more fully. Unlike Moses, who of old held back the waters of the Red Sea, at the bidding of God, by the use of a visible sign, our Saviour here acts at the bidding of none but Himself. He quells the storm, because the power of doing so belongeth only to God; and in this act He is once more showing the Father to His disciples. He is appearing among them as the visible expression of the Father's glory and power, stilling the storm

by an authority which centres in Himself as "one with the Father." He speaks to the moving powers of nature as He everywhere spoke to living man, as "one having authority." He does not pray that so it may be ; but He "speaks the word, and it is done."

Brethren, in one of the prayers offered for you in your infancy, the whole of our natural life on earth is likened to a sea, such as that on which our Saviour and His companions were tossed by the tempest. The Church of God is there compared to an ark of safety on the stormy waters ; and we pray for each child received into it, that he "may so pass the waves of this troublesome world, that finally he may come to the land of everlasting rest." And surely we cannot fail to see the fitness and beauty of the similitude.

As regards even the common outward incidents of life, for instance, there are many *ups and downs* in the history of each one of us. And when we come to search somewhat closely into the inner influences which have led us hither and thither in our onward course, our passions and our sins appear too like the winds and waves of a stormy sea. As the sailor is blinded by

the driving spray and rain, so our eyes are blinded by the mists of passion which we have lashed up around us ; we see not whither we are going ; headlong, like a boat on the crest of a towering billow, we are hurried onwards, until we find ourselves "with no power to help ourselves;" and then, after we have done our best to ruin our souls, we turn round, ungratefully and faithlessly, on Him whose guidance we would not follow, and say to Him, "Carest Thou not that we perish?" As if it was by Him that we had been brought to this strait! As if we had not been willingly yielding ourselves up to the wild career of evil inclinations and lusts which are hurrying us away, we know not whither, except that it is far from God. Yet if so it has been, the merciful Saviour, though He will reprove us for our fault, though He will show us how mad we have been in the frenzy of our sins, how mad we still are in the frenzy of fear which would make us distrust His willingness to receive us, and His power to help us, is yet very near at hand, and very ready to hear our cry. However wild our life has been, however in our distrust of Christ we have brought ourselves to despair of His love, and to the recklessness of

life which follows close on the footsteps of despair, yet with the precious words of His forgiveness He can calm our souls: with the promises of His grace. He can restore us from our fears: with the power of His spiritual help He can quell the bad passions which make such dismal havoc of our peace. Is there one such bad passion in any of you, my brethren, which is getting too strong for you, which you are finding it more and more difficult to master, which threatens more and more to overthrow you? If so, you are in that like the men in the ship on the Sea of Galilee, with the gale increasing on them, the ship becoming unmanageable, and the prospect immediately before them of being cast forth to struggle in the waves for their life. Do you, then, strive as they did—seek for help as they did. First endeavour to *make all fast*. Every reckless habit of speech or act which exposes you to temptation, watch over and seek to subdue. Be careful, too, in steering a fair course. When you see a great temptation nearing you which may prove too much for your strength, do not wait for it and suffer its shock; but avoid it, turn your back upon it, and strive to escape it. Use every means within your own reach; and

when you have done all, and find that you have still done little or nothing to the purpose, cry aloud to Christ for His help, not saying ungratefully, "Carest thou not that we perish?" but confessing humbly, "Without Thee, O Lord, I can do nothing." And thus, despite the troublesome waves of sin and temptation, you may become holy in heart; and then you will be truly at peace. You will realize in your soul a great calm; and when you come to die you will see in that nothing to affright you. It is God who is thus bringing you to the haven where you would be.

Or the troublesome waves on which your soul is tossed may be sad reverses, outward calamities, inward cares and griefs. There are some voyages which are nearly all calm, but there are hardly any without an occasional gale. There probably never lived a man whose soul was not, at some time or other, wrung by some deep personal sorrow. But with these, too, we must deal as with troubles of the other kind. We must strive to make all fast, and yet not stop here. For we may teach ourselves to be sober in our desires and affections; we may school ourselves into calmness in the season of our distress; we may take every

natural means of keeping our souls from being overwhelmed by it. But no deep sorrow was ever really calmed save by the soothing voice of the Saviour, drawing out the wounded heart from its selfish pain by the fellowship of His sufferings, and stilling all the storms of the soul by the tones of His loving sympathy. The comfort which is in Christ has power where all natural consolations fail.

I might have spoken, brethren, of the storms of life as they affect the Church at large—of times of persecution, times of barren hatred-exciting controversy, times when the troubles of the Church are unusually multiplied ; but for this no time now remains. Nor can I do more than point out how, when Christ sees fit to still the outward storm, not those alone who have cast in their lot with Him, but those also who are merely looking on, share also in some degree the blessings of the calm. The little ships that followed in the wake of that which conveyed the Lord and His disciples were filled with such as these. And so also many who think little about Christ's presence in the world ; who care little whether He has a kingdom or no ; who desire for themselves none of its

benefits, and will promise to perform none of its duties, are yet sharers in the blessings He diffuses wherever He is. If, wherever the name of Christ is had in reverence, and wherever His Gospel is obeyed, men learn to hate unrighteousness and wrong, and tumult and fightings are made to cease upon the earth, is not this a proof to us, as of old, that our Lord is He who stills every tempest of the world, and sends peace and blessing, not only to those who have sought the ark of safety, but to all who come within the range of His influence.

Let us carry the knowledge of this gladdening truth with us to our common life. It will go hard with us but we shall soon have to contend with some of the troublesome ways of the world—with temptations and sins, or with sorrows and cares. Let us remember, then, that Christ *doth* care—that He will help. Only let us not forbear to cry to Him; not with fear, but with trust; not as if there were no room for hope, but as if, with Him for a helper, there were no room for despair.

SERMON VI.

CHRIST CASTING OUT AN EVIL SPIRIT.

(6th Sunday after Epiphany, 1854.)

“ A man of the company cried out, saying, Master, I beseech thee, look upon my son, for he is mine only child ; and lo, a spirit taketh him, and he suddenly crieth out ; and it teareth him that he foameth again, and bruising him, hardly departeth from him. And I besought Thy disciples to cast him out, and they could not. And Jesus answering, said, O faithless and perverse generation ! how long shall I be with you, and suffer you ? bring thy son hither. And as he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him. And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father.”—St. Luke ix. 38—42.

THE chapter in which this transaction is narrated is full of wonderful things done and said by Jesus ; in every one of which He is set forth for your adoration, as the living and eternal Lord of this world. The incidents recorded appear at first to be very unlike one another, yet we shall see

that they all tend to one definite point. The very opening verse of the chapter speaks to us of Christ, as one armed with a wonderful and mysterious authority, not only over visible things but invisible ; else how could He have called together His disciples, as we are there told He did, and given them power and authority over all devils, which are the secret lurking foes of man's soul, as well as over all the diseases which molest his body ? Yet we are farther taught that Christ is not only a mighty spirit, with power over all other spirits, good and bad ; for see how He also cares for man's outward frame, and shows Himself the great giver of all the earth's teeming produce, in the miracle of feeding. And then, again, see how, lest we should even in this mistake His real character, the scene once more changes. While dwelling on His care for our bodily wants, on His pity for the very real ills of hunger and faintness, for which—no less than for our soul-pangs—He has so wakeful and tender a regard, we might be tempted to think that He is *only* “one of like passions with ourselves.” We might fail to see in this ministry to the body, what is only part of that spiritual ministry, in which all

lower things are consecrated to Himself as agents of His love. And therefore, after some strange words concerning the things that He must suffer, we are led to look upon Him in the Mount of Transfiguration, where He was covered with a more than merely mortal glory, and a voice from heaven was heard, saying, *This is my beloved Son ; hear Him.* And then again, in the miracle on which I desire now to fix your thoughts, the very first words of the chapter are recalled to our memory, and we behold in Him the Son of God indeed, whom men will do *well* to hear—the Word, by whom all things were made—the Lord of unseen spirits, as well as of living men,—that heavenly Prince, whose word even devils cannot altogether disobey.

And I have sought out this as a proper subject for our thoughts, rather in its connection with that collect and epistle, which might have been used to-day, had not the near approach of Lent compelled us to prefer the service appointed for Quinquagesima. On the Sixth Sunday after Epiphany, it is Christ manifested to destroy the works of the devil, which the Church sets forth to all her children ; and on the first day of a week,

when, in this parish, the duty of manifesting Christ to the heathen is to be urged upon us, it may help us to understand the full blessedness of that work to look first at the manner in which the devil already works in the bodies and souls of every one of us ; so that, knowing the full extent of that evil from which Christ has redeemed us, we may strive the more to make the good news known to men, that they are redeemed. Christ's own Spirit is already bearing such witness to them that they are well prepared to believe that to be true which our missionaries tell them, who declare to them, in the words of St. John, "He that committeth sin is of the devil ; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." Those of them who have been worshipping the devil, through fear of him, knowing his power to hurt them, are now to learn, to their infinite joy, that they need fear him no longer ; that there is *One* who is far mightier than he, who can deliver them from him, and that He whom alone they ought to worship, is One whom they can perfectly love, even that mighty and merciful Father who has

called them to behold what manner of love His is, in making them the sons of God.

And this was precisely the truth which all the incidents in the chapter before us were bringing out. What the people among whom our Lord lived did understand about Him was, that He was really and truly a man; what they did not understand about Him was, that He was also the Living and Eternal Word. Every act, therefore, in which the power of God was manifested as present with Jesus; every miracle in which His love and pity for man were seen actively working, was but a repetition of what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration, when a voice from Heaven was heard saying, "This is my beloved Son: hear him." And so it was when He cast the devil out of him that was possessed. It was the might of the Holy One triumphing over the cruelty of the Evil One, so that all men who would might clearly see what sort of power that was which was working in Christ, and the utter feebleness of whatever was brought into contest with it. So that we, too, my brethren, who may have been looking with a forlorn and despairing eye upon the present condition of the earth, hearing, it may be, among

the ignorant unbelieving at home, or the heathen abroad, many a strange, unnatural cry, indicating a nature sorely led astray from God—may yet, as we look upon this work of Jesus, take heart again. He who wrought this miracle is working still ; but still it is true, that if this kind have not yet come forth, it is because of the want of faith, the lack of self-denial, and the lack of prayer, on the part of those to whom the work of healing has been committed.

This was also the case with the disciples of Jesus, during our Lord's absence in the Mount of Transfiguration. A distressed father had brought to them his son, his only child, who was possessed by an evil spirit ; and besought them to cast it forth. But though they were surrounded by a crowd of unbelieving Jews, who were eager for every apparent failure, even of our Lord's disciples, which they might urge against their Master, yet they could not. Nothing could have been more disgraceful in their own eyes than this public defeat, and these feelings of disappointment would no doubt be greatly aggravated by the triumph of the scoffers standing by. At this moment, however, our Blessed Lord returned from

the mount, and to Him the father, nothing daunted by the failure of His disciples, once more makes his sorrowful appeal, repeating the account he had no doubt many times repeated before to others, in seeking their help: "*Lo, a spirit taketh him, and he suddenly crieth out, and it teareth him that he foameth again, and bruising him, hardly departeth from him.*" And here we see one more instance of the silent power of the Lord's compassion. In hardly any case do we find Jesus speaking many words of sympathy—in this differing so greatly from us, whose words of sympathy, even when real and sincere, so far outrun our deeds. He first rebukes the multitude for their want of faith, including in this rebuke His own disciples, and then we are told that He "rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the child."

Now it is natural that as you read such a narrative as this in your Bibles, you should be filled with wonder. In all your life, though you have seen many strange disorders, you think you have never seen anything like this. Indeed, you feel glad that you never have; for there is something very frightful in the thought of being so near the devil. If you were to see a man foaming at the

mouth, or rolling on the ground, or shrieking out wild, disjointed talk in a frantic, unreasonable manner, and could know for certain that it was the Devil working in the man, I can fancy the horror with which every bystander would recoil from such a sight. And you can at least perceive, in what you here read, how differently the power of God and the power of Satan, works in the whole nature of man; how the man who walks according to the law of reason which God has given him, is pleasant to look upon, in the evenness and sobriety of his course; how his powers of body and mind are a blessing to him, capable of being turned to all wholesome and profitable uses: but how these same powers, when once the Devil has got the rule over them, from being a blessing are turned into a curse, acting in a disorderly manner which brings misery on the man's own self, and is horrid and disastrous for others to look upon. But this would be a very vague and general use to make of such a fact; and therefore we may be sure that if we will look at it more narrowly, we shall find it has some teaching for us, far closer and more personal than this. Thinking a little farther about this thing, are you quite sure that

you have never seen the like of it? I think, if none of us have seen the very thing, yet every one of us has seen something very like it. We were reading last Sunday how an enemy has come into God's field, and sown tares among the wheat; and that applies, not only to good and bad men, but to everything in the world. The enemy is Satan, and, as it was he who sowed the bad seed of sin in the world, every fruit of that seed may be called his.

Now, in view of this fact, look again at the description given of this boy possessed by a devil. A sad description it is of a most diseased state of body and mind; and the root of it all, the malignant power of an evil spirit. Well, my brethren, have we never looked upon such a sight as this? What is all disease but the working out of that curse with which the devil has cursed our nature? May not this, then, be looked upon as in some sort a diabolical possession? What is recovery from illness but the driving out of that baleful power which had, for a while, got possession of the sufferer? It is a most solemn fact that, but for the Temptation and the Fall, neither disease, with its thousand stings of pain, nor death, with

its quiverings and tremors of coldness and fear, had ever entered the world ; and the whole after-history of man has shown how, as soul and body share in the sin, and in the transient pleasure which sin can bring, so also do they share in the pain which it leaves as its punishment—the corruption of the body being a dreadful but significant outward sign of the spirit's inward pollution. Yes, brethren, we cannot think for a moment on what we see around us, without perceiving that there hath unquestionably an evil spirit entered into God's universe ; and in the sufferings he scatters in his path, you may see what a cruel spirit he is. Every suffering of man may be regarded as in some sort his ; just as every work by which that suffering is alleviated may be regarded as the merciful work of that Blessed Jesus who is the Redeemer of mankind from all manner of sin and woe. The cruel cancer which gnaws away the quivering and sensitive flesh, and, laying bare nerve after nerve, pitilessly inflicts the most frightful torture, never ceasing until the seat of life at last is reached, and death comes, as a most happy and longed-for release : the slow, wasting consumption, with its hectic

flushes of hope and life, when the day of hope is long gone by, which secretly steals the life of man, amid so many circumstances of wretched and prolonged suffering: the horrible abscess which gathers, day by day, its loathsome mass of corruption, and feeds upon the strength of the sick man, whom it day by day consumes: the agonies of sickness, and burning thirst, and sleeplessness, and distressful dreams, and pain recurring in countless forms—what are these but the continued working of the baleful influence of that bad spirit who, at first, by lies and slanders, separated between God and man? May we not say of such an one, whom we see suffering any one of these maladies, that he is the subject of a diabolical possession? Yes, brethren, we may, with the strictest truth, and yet never quail at the thought. For though a strong man has entered the house, yet a stronger than he can drive him forth. And for every recovery of every sick member of the Church, we may rightfully give thanks to Him who of old “rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child.” It is Christ, the Saviour, triumphing over Satan, the tormentor. Nor does the comfort of this truth end here. For even

when disease has run its appointed course, and the evil power has gained an apparent triumph, we can rejoice in the knowledge Christ has given us, that then, when Satan has done his worst, then it is that his power of torment is brought for ever to an end. As we stand over the body of our friend, on whose pale brow there still gather the dews of death, even then we can thank our God and Saviour that all is not lost; that the body which, for a while, because allied to a sinful soul, was liable to be racked by many a cruel pain, is parted from it once for all; that the tie of their union is dissolved; that the body will rise again, indeed, but never such as it went into the grave—rise, fashioned like unto the glorious body of Christ, and enter on a new career of life, secure from all taint of corruption. Never, never will He suffer the evil one again to destroy any whom, as the Blessed Ones of His Father, He has gathered into the fold of His protection. Then it will again be true that the unclean spirit is rebuked and the children are healed.

But it is not only in the countless forms of bodily pain that we are again and again reminded of the old Bible story of the Temptation and the

Fall. There are other things which still lead us to say of individual men, "He is possessed by an unclean spirit." I need not tell you that there are some still more awful, and still more frequent evidences of Satan's power to lay hold on man, and make him do things, not only unnatural, but offensive even to the outward eye. I need but repeat to you the description given of this poor possessed boy: "Lo, a spirit taketh him, and he suddenly crieth out, and it teareth him, that he foameth again." Could we find truer language than this, to describe the case of one blinded by his angry and revengeful passions, or bewildered by the maddening influence of strong drink? When we see a man in a violent fury, the first exclamation that rises to our lips—the one most vividly descriptive of his condition—is, *Are you mad?*—his appearance is so like that of one utterly bereft of reason. Or what, again, is a more pitiable sight—pitiable because wanting everything that you look for in a reasonable being—than that of the reeling, brawling, quarrelsome drunkard? To say that such a man is like a beast is to say something very far short of the awful truth. The brutes that perish are good creatures of the

Lord, who live according to the law of their being ; but a man who can suffer himself to become a spectacle like this is one who has outraged utterly that law which God has given him to regulate *his* life ; and the awful thought is, that that man who, at the close of market or fair-day, has not the sense or reason of a beast, is yet one who has a reasonable soul, who was made in the likeness of God, and who has come to be what he is, only by deliberately breaking down and trampling under his feet every better principle of conscience and duty. His body was made to be the temple of the Holy Ghost, but it is too plain that an unclean spirit has entered into it and defiled it. Look at him, and say if it would not really appear that such a spirit is in him, crying out and tearing him, doing him grievous bodily harm, and making him an object of contempt and derision to all who are not far too pained and sorry to laugh. Oh, my friends, you who have been called to serve Christ, has any one of you ever suffered himself to come to this ? Be sure, then, that it is an evil spirit that has tempted you astray ; be sure, too, that you will go astray the next time, just in the same way, unless you

utterly renounce it, in everything; and if you have already bound yourself with the bands of this sin, it is Christ's power alone that can release you. Honest friends have perhaps been telling you your folly. Christ's ministers may have been trying in vain to cast this devil out, even as His disciples failed of old; but there is yet another Helper to whom you are urged to betake yourself. This kind, said our Lord, cometh not out but by fasting and prayer—and fasting implies a watchful guard over yourself, self-denial, not in one thing, but in all things, and humiliation in God's sight on account of known and acknowledged sin. Oh, that I could lead you to the cross of your Saviour, that so you might humble yourself with a godly penitence for what is in reality a grievous offence to Him—that there you might contrast the spirit in which He gave Himself to death that He might deliver you from Satan's power with that spirit of self-indulgence which is leading you astray, and making you his bonds slave again. If drunkenness is not your peculiar vice, is anger and the spirit of revenge? Is lying or evil-speaking? Is uncleanness or lasciviousness? Are oaths and profane jesting? Is

dishonesty, or unfaithfulness to those you have to serve? Whatever it be, look, I beseech you, on every besetting sin as an unclean spirit by which you are possessed ; look at it in the light of what your Saviour has done and suffered for you ; and if you feel how shocking a thing it is that you should have gone on in it so long, go and humble yourself before Him once again ; tell Him you know that He was manifested to destroy the works of the devil ; that you feel most deeply that this is one of them ; that, knowing that he who is born of God sinneth not, you would fain live as a son of God and an heir of eternal life ; and “having this hope in you, would purify yourself, even as Christ is pure.” “*He rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father.*” And so He will do to you. If you cry to Him, He will hear you. If you strive after His help, He will help you mightily. He will deliver you, as a restored and beloved child, to that Heavenly Father who, while yet a long way off, discerns the first emotions of your heart’s desire towards Him. And though you had been like one “beside himself ;” though you had been very mad and very wayward, yet, now that you

are restored to your right mind, there will be such joy over you as it is meet there should be over one who was dead and is alive again, who was lost and is found. And if, not in ourselves individually, but in our parish, our immediate neighbourhood, or our country, we should see evils which we know not how to redress—wicked practices on a grand scale, setting at naught God's law—monstrous social wrongs, through which men are being ruined, body and soul,—let us apply the same principle to every such thing. Not calling it by any but its right name; not describing that as sweet which we know to be bitter, or that as good which we know to be evil, let us yet remember that there is a God of righteousness and truth that judgeth in the earth; that He can and will redress the evils against which we can make no head; and that meanwhile, by prayer, and fasting, and unwearied effort, we are to strive to cast out every evil spirit by which the framework of society is possessed. We need not fear; we need not faint; we need not hang down our hands in feebleness: for we work in the presence, and under the eye, and with the blessing of Him by whom every work of the devil must eventually be destroyed.

SERMON VII.

THE CROSS WE HAVE TO BEAR.

“He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.”— St. Matt. x. 38.

No doubt it is easier to see the faults of other people than it is to see our own; easier still to see how and where men went wrong, in times that are long past, than to look calmly and justly on things in the present, in which our passions are deeply engaged; and therefore, perhaps, we do not always make sufficient allowance for the people among whom our Lord lived, in their great sin of rejecting Him. However convincing to us, His life failed to convince them. Yet, in looking back upon it, surely there were some things in it that might have convinced them! And here I do not mean grand, overwhelming proofs of His Divinity, but, in everything He did, such traits

and indications of character, as might have shown them that He was no artful deceiver or misguided enthusiast, consequently that He was really and truly what He said He was, the Christ, the Son of God. They might have thought, if they had been in the mind to think on that side of the question at all, how little He was like the common run of popular leaders or teachers of new doctrines. Such men, when seeking to gain over others to their views, have rather kept in the background the things which are disagreeable, and likely to excite a prejudice against their teaching. *He* obtruded them. They, when attempting to make converts, generally present attractive pictures of advantages to be gained. *He* spoke darkly of the sorrows and trials that must first be endured. He did not try to make men impatient of the present restrictions and burdens of their life, but rather spoke of these very things, through which God was going to raise them up to a better, and a purer, and a far freer life. Redemption is not possible, unless there be a curse from which to be redeemed. Rest is not possible, unless there be first fatiguing labour. Victory and reward are not possible, unless there be first strife and

endurance. And thus, while calling men to Himself, Jesus calls them not first to rest, but first to work in His service, not first to self-gratification, but first to self-sacrifice. "He that taketh not his cross"—he that giveth not up to God all the wilfulness of his wayward heart, and beareth not his burden of shame, and pain, and self-denial, or, at least, he who is not willing to do this, is not worthy of me. Now this is not the way in which a self-seeking man would have spoken; for those who tell people painful truths, can seldom hope to be much liked by them. Had He been like many of the teachers and prophets of false religions, He would rather have fed the hopes of the people with visions of speedy release from privation and painfulness—of earthly ease and heavenly repose; He would have ministered to the indolent spirit of self-indulgence, which leads men to turn away from present trial and duty, would have discoursed largely of the rewards, and hardly at all of the sufferings of the Christian life. But, instead of that, He plainly tells them that they are not to have all in this world just as they would wish it; that they are to deny themselves; and that the love of self must give

place to love of Him whom they had chosen as their Master, and whom they had agreed to follow,—not knowing whither they went. He knew what was before them: those years of stormy trial through which the Church had to pass were not hidden from Him; and He spoke thus to His disciples because He loved them more than He feared them—because He would not lap them in a false repose for a season, only to make the surprise that awaited them the more painful when it came upon them; because He knew that they who would fall away at the mention of distant suffering were precisely they who would not be able to stand the test when the hour itself had come; and because—had there been no other reason—He had come into the world to *bear witness to the truth*; and could not, even by His silence, deceive those whom He designed to lead into all truth. But prominent above all things else is the Divine love which shines in this sad fidelity. It is no kindness—even *we* feel it to be no kindness—to conceal from those we love any evil which we know will certainly befall them. We think it a cruel thing when the doctor who knows that his patient has

in him the seeds of a fatal disease, continues to flatter him with groundless hopes of recovery.

And so it is one of the proofs we have of our Lord's great love, as well as of His elevation above the weakness of mortal nature, that he did not keep back from his disciples those truths which might cause them to feel some pain at the time. Had He been a mere man, He might possibly have done this; for you know that we are often so weak in our tenderness to one another, that we cannot bear to break bad news which yet it were a real kindness to tell. Some people are themselves so much wounded by having to give others pain, that they think they are sparing others when in fact they are only sparing themselves. But there was none of this weakness in our blessed Saviour; though He was compassionate above all that men have ever felt or imagined. No man has ever felt that depth of tenderness, that intensity of pity which He felt for the sinners he had come to save. Yet he did not hesitate to wound them when it was needful, by telling them the painful news, that He Himself must be betrayed into the hands of the Jewish rulers and scribes, that He must suffer death upon the cross, and go down to the grave;

that His disciples also must be baptised with the same baptism of suffering, if they, with Him, would rise to the life immortal; and that their faith must be proved by many fiery trials, their affections raised above the world, by cruel experience of its hard treatment. If, therefore, we see traces of a diviner love than that which prevails among men, even in the freedom with which our Lord spoke to His disciples of coming evils; we see also, in his precise description of the very nature of these evils, proofs of more than human knowledge; proofs, too, in His very words, of a desire to draw closer and closer the ties between himself and His chosen ones; else would He not thus have spoken of the self-denial to which they were pledged under that painful image of the cross. But He, to whom the whole scene of His own last agony was already present, knew how the cross on which He was to yield up His life would draw all men unto Him, would draw not only many of the heedless and godless multitude unto Him in true penitence and fervent love, but would also draw to Him in closer bonds those disciples who had already obeyed His call; how, in view of it, they would bear about in their body

continually the dying of their Lord and Master ; how it would brighten the darkness and the shame of ignominious deaths with heavenly glory ; and how, as they looked back upon it, it would strengthen the weak-hearted to resist, even unto blood, striving against sin. And therefore, beforehand, He spake to them of taking up their cross, that when He was no longer with them they might remember His words, and read them with a fuller meaning in the light cast upon them by His own cross and passion. And to us, too, brethren, there is plenteous meaning in these words ; for if Christ be no less our Lord and Master than he was theirs, there must be in us the same *willingness*, at least, to take up our cross ; and it will be strange, indeed, if we do not find *something* in the lot of each one of us to put that willingness to the test.

Our Lord's words had, indeed, a meaning, as addressed to His first disciples, which they cannot have to us. For there was in them a plain allusion to the suffering of martyrdom which nearly all of them were called to undergo ; and from the fear of this at least, we in this land are free. The days of persecution for adherence to

the blessed faith once delivered to the saints seem, as far as our own country is concerned, to be at an end. The many sufferings of our fathers in darker days have won for us this privilege. The blood of the martyred saints of the Reformation caused the Gospel of Christ's love to take so deep a root on our soil, that we may venture to hope deeds so merciless will never again be perpetrated in the land for whose religious well-being they were content to die. The days which saw such deeds done, whether by the zealots of Rome, or the false friends of a purer faith, are, as we trust, gone never to return again. The spirit of persecution, if not extinct, will yet manifest itself in a different form. The crime of bloodshed in the name of God has become so well understood, and its inability to compel belief, or to root out error, so abundantly demonstrated, that milder measures, if not a more merciful spirit, may hereafter be looked for.

We have not this kind of suffering to fear, therefore ; but there may be others. There are, in every lot, things hard to bear—yet which must be borne—and which may be justly called crosses because they impose on man an unwelcome

burden; because they inflict pain; because they try his patience and submission to the will of God.

Let us think of some of these crosses :—

1. One of these, and one of the most palpable, is personal bodily suffering. This is the most obvious form of suffering in this world. It is the one which we hear of most. It is the one which there is no fighting against. It is the one which, if it be accompanied with great pain, and if it have become confirmed—we have it least in our power to mitigate. Other distresses may be forgotten; the thought of them may be banished by an effort of will; but if a man be suffering very agonizing bodily pain, his is a strong will indeed if he can drive the thought of *it* away from him. Now here is a trial of a man's devotion to Christ. If he be one who regards Christ as his master, and rejoices to follow Him, we shall discover it by the manner in which he bears this evil lot. He knows it is not all evil. He knows, indeed, that evil is the root of it; it witnesses to him of the ravages sin has made on his whole nature; and yet he sees in it, and the chastening it works on him, and the graces that grow out of its meek

endurance, the promise and prospect of redemption. The chapter from which our text is taken teaches us how minute is the care, and how sleepless the watchfulness of God's good providence. All things are subject to His direction ; and from the ore of earthly suffering He can draw forth the pure gold of heavenly purity. The suffering Christian, then, when in weakness, sickness, or pain, can feel that this is no accident. It has been done as part of a deliberate design, and yet of no malignant design. It is an enemy, indeed, who has made him suffer ; for an enemy it was that sowed in his nature the seeds of death. But yet, though this thing was intended to have been done to his hurt, it is overruled by his Father, who purposes to bring some blessing on him through its means. It is his cross, which he is to bear, and to bear manfully. If he is not willing to take it, as ordained by God, and to bear it for Christ's sake, he is not worthy of a Master who, though all things were by Him and for Him, was yet made perfect through sufferings. You who are well and healthy now, remember that disease and illness of some kind are your certain portion, sooner or later ; and be preparing even

now to bear that cross. Your Lord, in His mercy, has told you of it beforehand, that so when the time comes, you may not be afraid with any amazement ; depend for your happiness less and less upon things that are to perish with the using ; and think oftener how it would be with you if all these outward pleasures were to be snatched away from you.

2. Those whom God does not try in this particular way are sometimes tried in a manner hardly less distressing. In the case of some, it is not personal but family affliction that is the great cross of life. Some one of the domestic circle is sick—an habitual invalid—a constant sufferer. Or a case may be conceived still worse than this : Some one or other of that well-beloved circle has gone astray, has sinned greatly and shamefully, and is showing no sign of repentance, no disposition to return. *This* is very hard to bear ; for here there is not even that comfort which is accessible in cases of bodily illness ; since no man can look upon this as sent by God, or appointed by Him. The future good that is to come out of this present evil, seems therefore more difficult to hope for, or believe in. “ No man can say when

he is tempted, I am tempted by God ; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man ; but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed." The profligate career, therefore, of those under your care cannot be looked upon as God's deed. It is not sent by God ; and you may consider it a happy thing, indeed, if it cannot be traced to your own sinful neglect. But, though not sent by God, yet you may make a Christian use of it. Doubtless, there will be many a prayer uttered for the unhappy prodigal ; and even in this there will be much profit. But should these intercessions seem to be followed by no immediate answer, the very trial of faith which this will impose may be sent for good ; seeing that "the trying of your faith worketh patience ;" and patience must "have her perfect work," if ye would be "perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Bearing this cross in a meek and submissive spirit, the record of your patient and Christian endurance will not be lost ; and it may be that He who has seen your inward strife, and witnessed your secret sufferings, will ere long give you all your heart's desire.

3. The Cross which another man is called to

bear may be of a kind still widely differing from either of those that have been mentioned. It may be connected with his worldly circumstances. Some men have a hard fight even to live; and sometimes there come unexpected reverses, which bring their own privation and distress. These, also, cannot always be regarded as sent by God. Sometimes they are brought on by a man's own carelessness, by his own prodigality, by a blameable want of caution and foresight. But often, it is true, they befall those who have not been guilty of any of these things,—in such a manner as no prudence could have foreseen or provided against. But however the thing has happened: if it *has* happened, it has become one of the features of our lot. It is the *cross* in our experience from which we must not shrink if we would, and against which we must not murmur. All, indeed, depends on the disposition which we bring to our joys and sorrows, as to the good or the ill we shall receive from them. “We know,” says St. Paul, “that all things work together for good to them that love God—to them who are called according to His purpose.” But what a difference is here made by the inspired writer between two classes of

people who, friendly as they may be with one another, and little as they might seem to differ, are yet regarded by God as actually opposed! They are those that love God, and those that do *not* love Him—that is, do not love Him with that magnanimous forgetfulness of self without which love is nothing worth. There are, on the one hand, those who are ready to deny themselves for Him; who do not hesitate to take up their cross and follow Him; who, so long as they can see Him before them as their guide, are willing to go anywhere and to endure anything, however hard; and those, on the other hand, who are willing enough to follow Him, if they can do so without serious discomfort, but who are offended at the first serious trial of their submission,—the first thing which requires them to give up their own will, and bear what God has appointed with cheerfulness and gladness, as far better for them than anything they could have devised for themselves. The one set of people are so disposed that all the events that happen to them bring no benefit along with them; while the others, looking upon the arrangements of Providence with a different eye, find that all things are made to work together for their good. Yet the people are in the same rank

and circumstance of life; the events, to all outward appearance, are the same; and the only difference is in the spirit which they bring to the reception of them.

Of course I cannot tell, my brethren, whether there are any here to whom this part of my sermon applies; but if there are, suffer me to speak to you plainly about it. Even if it were brought upon you by no fault of your own; if what you say be quite true, that no man could have foreseen such misfortunes as yours, and that they were brought about by means over which you had no control; yet, are you quite sure you are right in looking upon your present lot as something essentially evil? If you are among those who love God, it cannot be so; for He "makes all things work together for the good of them that love Him." But, if hitherto you have *not* truly loved Him, this may be His way of showing you what kind of stay that world is on which you were leaning, in your forgetfulness of Him; and if your poverty in the things of this life should lead you to seek more earnestly for the riches of His grace, in which alone there never can be failure and disappointment, it will be a happy

thing for you in the end that ever you became poor. Or, to suggest yet another of the many possible explanations of that which has befallen you, it may have been devised in proof of God's special watchfulness over you, and special love for you. He who knoweth the heart of man may have seen that it was not good for you to be rich; that in the abundance of the perishable possessions of this life lay your great danger and your great snare; and that a lowlier lot was safer than a loftier one. If this be so indeed, with what cheerfulness should you bear this cross!

Nay, brethren, even if your poverty has been brought upon you by your own fault, still it may be made a means of profit; for as everything which makes us feel the hand of distress upon us, tends to sober us, and make us more thoughtful than before; so even out of improvidence or imprudence in the management of your affairs, there may result such misery as will lead you to look back upon your mistaken life with a serious, anxious, inquiring gaze; and if yours has been such a manner of life as cannot be looked upon without shame and sorrow, then out of this evil God may bring good to your soul. For it may

lead you to godly sorrow for sin, and "that repentance which needeth not to be repented of."

In whatever manner your poverty may have come; whether you were born poor, or whether you unexpectedly became poor; or, whether you have brought yourself to poverty by your own follies or sins; yet, if *now* you are desirous to profit by God's dealings, good may come out of it. It is your *cross*, and therefore you must not shrink from it. Whatever acts of self-denial it demands, you must not seek to evade. There must be no squandering the little that you have in the hope of some unforeseen alms being bestowed which will make up for your extravagance; there must be no borrowing or buying what you do not expect to have the means of paying for. That is, in the first place, dishonest; but it is also a refusal to bear the hardships which God has appointed as part of your lot. If it is His will that you should be poor, then (however others, in the spirit of Christian kindness, may strive to make your poverty more endurable) it is God's will that *you*, at least, should allow yourself only such indulgences as your means can afford. It may be difficult to keep this rule, and in order to

do it, you may have to sacrifice many necessary things; but if the spirit of Christ be in you, you will pray for grace to do even this.

In consenting, then, to that degree of poverty which has been appointed to you as your portion, you have the consolation of knowing, brethren, that in this, you are following Christ in that very thing which was the constant trial of his suffering life. "Ye know that the Lord Jesus, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor." And you can remember, too, that in being made poor, you are thus placed in a position which, if you will, may be made most favourable to holiness. You may look upon poverty like sickness, as one of God's ordinary means of grace, one of those correctives with which His Providence has furnished you to the natural worldliness of your hearts. It is true, that you may abuse this as well as other means of grace; you may miss the teaching it was intended to give you; but this, nevertheless, is its true character. It is, as has been well said, "a sort of discipline—the ascetic rule of God's Providence. They that are poor are already under a discipline of humility and self-denial."

Brethren, I have pointed out a few of the commoner crosses of human life ; but were we to enumerate them all, it would be a long list indeed. Let me, however, now say a word or two in conclusion, as to the spirit in which they should one and all be regarded. Our effort should be not to forget them, or drive them away from our path, but to bear them, and to derive from them the spiritual good for which they were sent. We may bless God, indeed, that for every trial of man's lot He has appointed some suitable consolation ; but wherever a distinct peculiarity of trial has been appointed, we should beware lest, in our eagerness for consolation, we miss the benefit designed for us by Him who, when He chastens us, chastens us for our profit, "that we might be partakers of His holiness." The cross laid upon us may be a weakly body, or it may be family distress, or it may be poverty : it may be some bodily defect or deformity, or some dulness and incapacity of mind : it may be something arising out of the society in which we move, or the circumstances in which we are placed ; the want of true religion in our dearest friends ; the temptation to yield more to the maxims and practices of

the world than we feel to be right ; or the want of sympathy and confidence in those of our friends who *are* living a life of true godliness ;—but whatever our trial be, we are to remember that God gives us crosses in our daily life, not that we should flee from them in a spirit of self-indulgence, but that we should bear them in a spirit of self-sacrifice ; and yet, at the same time, hold fast our fidelity to Him.

I might, indeed, have spoken of other crosses. In this sermon I have spoken only of things which it is very hard to bear, as justly deserving to be called by that name. And yet I feel that this is too narrow a definition : for there are some things which, though they are not hard to bear, it is very hard to bear *well*. Prosperity and riches—how many are there to whom these are not a very heavy, weary, joyless burden, bringing little real satisfaction ; entailing much vexation of spirit ; until they at last get to understand that these are things given them, not for their own enjoyment, but for the service of Christ their Master ? What a hard thing it is, too, to be the head of a house, and have children and servants under us !—how hard, I mean, to be in that position with-

out feeling that we are failing in somewhat of our duty to Him who laid that trust upon us ! What a hard thing, again, to be a proprietor of land, or a farmer of land, and yet do all that God requires we should do in behalf of those who labour upon it ! What a temptation to regard them as mere instruments of gain, as we regard the other implements of husbandry—things to be bought with money, the best we can get, at the cheapest rate, to turn the fertility of the ground into material wealth for ourselves as quickly as possible ! You that have labourers under you, remember that this trust too is a cross ; that though you may think, when you have paid them the wages you consider their due, you have done all, yet these men, who, with their wives and children, live upon your land, are also a spiritual charge upon your souls. Ah, my brethren, God has committed to you a few things to which he requires you to be strictly faithful. You must look to it very earnestly that your besetting sins do not reproduce themselves in these poor men and their families : aye, and more than that, you must look to it that you are exerting upon them such an influence, for their real spiritual good, as a master

can so largely exert on those to whose labours, no less than to his own wealth and skill, he owes all he has. Think of their souls as well as their bodies. Think not only how they do their work, and whether they fairly earn their wages; but think also how it is with them in their homes, and whether you cannot do something to make their cross of poverty lighter, and even a life of godliness easier to them. My friend, there may be no other cross in your lot; no sickness, no distress, no poverty; but this trust, this responsibility for those who are in your employment, is a very serious one—very difficult to bear well,—needing, to keep you from neglecting it, a very lively and wakeful sense of duty to Him whom we also have for our Master in Heaven.

And thus you see, brethren, our Saviour's call to take up our cross comes to every one of us. We shall have to bear it *somehow*, for it is laid upon us; but there is a mighty difference between reluctantly consenting to that which we have a power to alter, and *taking it up*—willingly and lovingly bearing it, in cheerful obedience to God's ordinance, and in glad imitation of our loving Master, Jesus Christ. Let us each look for our

particular cross, not out of the course of our daily life, but *in* it; and when we have found out what it is, let us act in reference to it as those who would be really worthy of so great and self-denying a Master. God knows how hard a thing it is, this crucifixion of self—how much easier to speak about it than to do it; but yet it would become far less hard to us, if we were found continually looking to Jesus, and learning to grow in likeness to Him, through love of Him—through an intense, and increasing, and self-forgetful love of Him, which would make the very act of sacrifice easy and desirable. Here then is the thing after which we are to endeavour. To Him who, by His Cross and Passion, has called us to enter into the full comprehension of His love; to Him perpetually looking, and in His blessed steps continually striving to walk—we, too, shall learn, though it be painfully and with many struggles, gladly to bear our cross, gladly in it to suffer *with Him*.

can so largely exert on those less than to his own wealth he has. Think of their sorrows and troubles. Think not only how it is with them, and whether they fairly earn it, but think also how it is with them, and whether you cannot do more to lighten their cross of poverty lightened by godliness easier to them. There shall be no other cross in your lot than distress, no poverty; but this is a heavy burden for those who are in your condition—a very serious one—very difficult to bear, needing, to keep you from falling into a careless and lively and wakeful sense of your condition, we also have for our Master.

And thus you see, brethren, that to take up our cross comes not from a reluctant consent. We shall have to bear it as a burden upon us; but there is a mighty power to alter, and *taking* it, in cheerful and lovingly bearing it, in cheerful obedience, and in glad submission to our Master, Jesus Christ.

SERMON VIII.*

STEDFASTNESS IN DOCTRINE AND FELLOWSHIP.

“They continued stedfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers.”—Acts ii. 42.

At the close of the day of Pentecost, that was a striking scene which the Christian community presented. The day had opened with signs and wonders ; but these, like all the miraculous incidents of the Gospel history, are worthy of record only in connection with the spiritual truth of which they bore witness, and the moral purpose for which they were sent. The tongue-like flames of fire at length died away. The sound as of a rushing mighty wind, which had startled the assembled company, and stricken them with awe, was in like manner hushed, nor was there any longer seen the unusual sight of unlettered men

* Preached in Herstmonceux Church.

speaking familiarly and with ease, the language of strangers from "every country under heaven." But *that* of which these had been the outward indications still remained; and in the face of all incredulous explanations of the previous events, which the bystanders were no doubt ready enough to propose, there remained the undeniable fact, that on that day no fewer than three thousand souls had been added to the company of the faithful. We who labour slowly and painfully to bring even one soul to God, naturally look back on such an event with earnest and curious inquiry, if haply we may discover anything in the history of that day which may make us wiser in this work. But little reveals itself which can instruct or help us. It appears that this general conversion took place after, or in, the preaching of a sermon by St. Peter, the chief speaker among the Apostles. This must, we think, have been a very powerful sermon; and, if we care to inquire wherein lay the source of its power, the actual sermon is given us to read for ourselves. But on reading it, it is manifest that if it had this power it was not from anything remarkable in it, considered merely as a piece of composition.

In this country, some of those who are now living may remember a great crisis in which religion, after a long season of depression, awoke again, and began to assert itself as a living thing, in all its accustomed forms and established rites. At that time, in the Church of England and out of it, men heard of powerful sermons preached in various populous districts, by which multitudes were converted. The divine ordinance of preaching was then attended with a large measure of God's blessing. And, knowing what kind of sermons those were, some may perhaps have concluded, from this, that the sermons which God specially blesses must always be of the same kind—full of strong, forcible statements about salvation and damnation ; vivid pictures presented to the imagination of the suffering love of Christ, of the blessedness of heaven, of the horrors of hell, of the danger of dying in an impenitent state; and exciting appeals of various kinds, calculated to move the sensibility of all who are naturally susceptible of such excitement. But now, if we turn to this powerful sermon preached by St. Peter, we shall find nothing of this kind. It contains very little besides a plain statement of

facts—very wonderful facts, doubtless—but still, only the plain strong facts which every preacher must set forth, more or less fully, concerning God's presence among men, and His special manifestations ; first, in the person of His Son Jesus Christ ; and next, in the person of the Holy Ghost, who was now making His presence manifest to every man in that company. And this leads us very directly to the conclusion, that if St. Peter's sermon were so much more powerful than any of the sermons preached now-a-days, it was because God's Spirit accompanied it more fully, and gained for it an entrance into men's hearts, and bowed their spirits under its influence, as the strong wind bends the grass of the plain. I do not know what sermons or addresses to the people there were being made that day in other houses or parts of Jerusalem ; but I am sure there was none other of which it could have been said, that in close connection with it 3,000 began to forsake their sins, to repent, to call upon God, and to put away from them the filth of an evil conscience. Now this ought surely to carry with it some instruction to those who are in the habit of speaking of the House of God (as it is so often

spoken of in this neighbourhood) merely as “a place of hearing”—that is, as a place where a sermon is preached; for I suppose no one would speak of *prayer* as a thing merely to be “heard;” showing us that the difference, the only difference of any importance as regards our souls, between one sermon and another, is not in the thing itself, but in the spiritual power which accompanies it. Preaching is an ordinance of God, in right of which the very feeblest sermon that ever was spoken must have some power to turn men from the error of their ways. It is not, however, in any particular way of stating the truth that its power consists, still less in any poor accidental graces of manner or expression—I mean, its power to purify the soul, and make it strong in what is good; but in the nature of the truth it must proclaim, because there is a spiritual power in that truth, altogether apart from the vehicle of its communication, which makes it mighty, through God, to the pulling down of the strongholds in which men fortify themselves in their favourite habits of wickedness. And if sometimes it happens, as sometimes very likely it does happen, that you listen to a sermon, and think you have

got no good from it, it may be, doubtless, partly the fault of the minister, in not telling out freely enough the grand Gospel of God's love which he has been sent to deliver, in not allowing it free course, that it may cause itself to be glorified in the hearts and lives of those who have received it ; but its want of power to edify may also depend on something different from this. It may depend either on the hardened prayerless state of the hearts which have shut themselves up from it, and then wonder it can find no entrance ; or on a general want of faith and prayer amongst us as a community. It may be that we have all of us in our secret hearts, been making the power of the Gospel over us depend too much on the mere outward means we have taken to make it effectual—on human speech, and human contrivances of all kinds ; and that we do not believe, half heartily enough, that the important matter is not what *we* speak, or what we do, but what God shall speak and work through us and in us. And as it is never safe for us to lay any sin, of any kind, with which we are chargeable as a community, at the door of our neighbours, but always to see first whether it does not lie at our own door, when we find that

day of God's ordinances (whether it be the ordinance of preaching, or public prayer, or whatever others there be,) have failed to edify us, the best thing we can do is to look upon this as our own individual fault, and to make haste individually to set it right. If preaching and prayer fall upon our ears cold and profitless, then let us be sure that somewhere or other, the need of God's spiritual help, and its power too, have been forgotten: that we have lost it because we have not valued it; because we have not prayed for it; because we have not trusted to it. The presence of the Spirit is far too precious a gift to be bestowed, or at least to be continued, to those who do not believe in it, who do not seek it, who do not dread the want of it. And yet, even if there be this lack of profit, this unnatural coldness to the best and blesseddest of God's gifts, neither are we to be content with satisfying ourselves that it is caused by a withdrawal of spiritual help, mourning over our "spiritual desertion," and doing nothing to get back that which we have lost. We are to remember that He who gave us that good gift at first, that He whose grace we have driven away from ourselves, is our Father; that in this He has been dealing with us, as He

ever doth deal with us, as sons; that, knowing that He is the great source whence alone our goodness and our happiness can come, He has been convincing us of our absolute dependence on Him, that so we might not make utter shipwrecks amid the storms of sin and pain, by trusting to any other stay; that He has in His love for us so constituted us, that we cannot turn away from Him without immediately beginning to feel our need; but that when we are brought very low, whether in body or soul, He is still our hope; and that in Christ's own words, we have been taught what we must do, in order that we may once more feel the joy of his presence with us again. "*If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?*" Until we have each of us done this, with exceeding earnestness; until we have each of us besought His help that we may be of the pure in heart, to whom alone God fully reveals Himself, we can never have just reason to complain that our souls are not profited by the word, and that we are not spiritually fed.

If the living power of God's Spirit be with us,

the preaching of His Word will be mighty amongst us, even as it was with the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, turning us from the error of our ways, and filling us with a horror of those particular sins of ours, which His searching ministry has laid bare.

Having seen, then, what it is that can *alone* make a sermon powerful, and how each member of its congregation may contribute his part towards making it so, let us now turn to the account given of these three thousand converts, and inquire what was the fashion of their life after they were added to the Church, and see if from that also we cannot glean some lesson or example for ourselves. There have been rousing sermons preached, which have made men cry out about their poor souls, and ask what they must do to be saved ; or which, taking a different tone, have dissolved them in tears, wrapping them in a sort of ecstasy at the pictures presented of the compassionate love of Jesus ; but too often addresses like these, which appeal mainly to the feelings of the moment, have been as transient in their effects as the moods of mind to which they ministered. The selfish penitent, who had thus been made to think only

of wrath to come as he had never thought of it before, and been led to seek salvation, not from hatred at and horror of the sin which was destroying him, ere many days or weeks had passed away, was found in the same self-seeking spirit—his fears for the time forgotten—seizing eagerly on some present fleshly thing which offered a speedier gratification to his innate love of self. So also the man who had been so much moved at the story of Christ's sufferings, or at the representations made to him of the patient loving pity of God, was by-and-bye affected in the same way by other representations, appealing to other feelings and sympathies, showing the short-lived character of that piety whose root is only in the affections, not in the conscience. That change of purpose which springs from mere passion—it does not greatly matter whether it be a passion of love or a passion of fear—is commonly very evanescent. It is like a very shallow spring, whose streamlet may for a day or two sparkle with exceeding brightness, but its source being soon dried up, speedily ceases to flow. Far different is the result when the conscience, testifying to man all his days of sin separating between him and God,

has found in Christ a relief from its weary load. then, indeed, the story of his love, seen in its true relation to the curse which called it forth, becomes connected not merely with passing moods of amiable feeling, but with that which is the very deepest principle of our nature, which man can never part from without ceasing to be a man, and has thus a real ground of permanence. And herein is a key to the meaning of those words of our Saviour : “ Whosoever drinketh of this water”—the common water which quenches the body’s thirst—“shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; for the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” Now as St. Peter’s sermon made no appeal to the transient passions of which I have spoken, but rather set forth Christ a living Person as an object of living faith—the Crucified, indeed, but still the Lord and the anointed king of those who had crucified Him—we naturally expect to find in the piety of these converts a permanence bespeaking to us its deep and sure foundation. And so, in fact, we do. Their repentance was no sudden frenzy of fear; neither was it any wild mysterious

ecstasy of joy. Except that we know they all did make profession of their penitence for sin, and did all seek remission from sin in their baptism into the name of Christ, we know nothing of what they said or did on what would be called the day of their conversion. Those who would demand a particular religious experience as a proof of a man's conversion will look in vain for anything of the kind, to the remarkable history of the day of Pentecost. But inasmuch as these particular experiences, when told aloud to our fellow-men, are apt to be very much magnified or distorted, we may rather rejoice that the proofs given us of their spiritual change are far more certain and reliable. What could be a more satisfactory ~~account~~ **account of the further progress of any large company of new-made converts than this:—***“ They continued in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer.”*

Now, brethren, to come to ourselves. In what respects ought we to expect that we shall find the conduct of these early converts repeated in the Christian congregation now? In one respect we can never find it exactly repeated, for you can never stand in precisely the same relation to the

Gospel preached to you as they did. That is, you can never hear it declared to you as something quite new; something whose main facts you need to be convinced of; something which, though a voice within you declares it to be the very thing you need, all your previous associations and teaching would incline you to reject as untrue. That was the condition of mind in which those were, who, hearing the wonderful proofs the Spirit was giving of His presence with the Church, could find no explanation of this but the impossible one, that these men were filled with new wine—that that which usually steeps the senses in sleep, and chokes the voice of wisdom, had in these opened the gates of utterance so that they could speak, not only to men of their own land, but of all lands; not to their ears only, but to their understanding also. But that can never be your condition of mind. As far back as you can remember, you have been hearing and learning those great truths which they then heard for the first time, so as to believe them. The things which you believe now about God, and Christ, and your own souls, you cannot tell when you began to believe. You only know that that belief has

grown with your growth and strengthened with your strength. Yet there is a particular point in the life of each one of you, when you are called to look more earnestly within, to see what it is you do know and believe, what it is you are trusting to for eternity, by what law you are shaping your course even now. At that time of which I am speaking, you are urged by those who have the spiritual charge of you to make a free, personal, honest confession of your faith, as you have learned that faith from Holy Scripture from your childhood ; to look God's commandments, with all their consequences, and in all the fulness of their spiritual meaning, fairly in the face, before repeating your promise, that what they command that you will do ; and to take once more for yourself those vows of manly obedience to Christ, of manly renunciation of all that would conflict with that obedience, the completion of which has been the one great aim of your training as Christian children from your baptism onwards. You know that the time of which I am speaking is that of your confirmation. A very serious, solemn time it is ! A very blessed season in the life of many a Christian. The very point

on which his whole future life has turned. Then you are brought into such close contact with your ministers as you have never before enjoyed; for the occasion is one which removes all difficulty on their part in seeking that close personal knowledge of you, and sympathy with you, which they **always** desire to maintain. Then their hearts are **drawn** out to you with such longings for you as you **can never** know; then you begin to find in them what **perhaps** you hardly believed before—pastors tending **and caring** for you, in whom you can rely, and whose advice **you may** always freely seek. What the Apostles were ~~to the early~~ converts, that your own parochial ministers ~~must en-~~deavour to be to you. What the sermon on the day of Pentecost did for them—*that*, with God's blessing, the season of confirmation is intended to do for you. Not, indeed, that God's grace is limited to any one ordinance of His Church; but it is a very awful thing to be confronted, as you then are, by the grand question whether you will serve God or the Devil; and to return, as your only answer, a continued life of carelessness. I am speaking now, my brethren, of **that on which** I have myself bestowed no labour on your behalf;

but, as entering into the labours of others, who have striven anxiously for your souls, and as one knowing from old experience what these labours are, I would fain, on this Communion Sunday, lead your thoughts back to the time of your confirmation. You remember well the solemn thoughts, the earnest vows, of that season; and I solemnly ask you now to compare yourselves with those, on the day of Pentecost, who “continued in the Apostles’ fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” By fellowship we are here doubtless to understand chiefly, that they continued in visible Church communion with the Apostles, and did not depart from their goodly order. But visible communion is nothing worth unless it be the sign of a relation which affects the whole manner of life; and therefore, where this relation subsists, we may surely expect that, at the very least, there will be frequent personal intercourse between the members of the congregation, and those who minister to them in the word and doctrine. Now, is this true of you who no long time since assumed the full responsibility which devolves on you in right of your confirmation vows? Remem-

bering the pastoral intercourse you had at that season, have you in any way sought to continue or renew that time? You cannot think that it is in the discharge of any mere formal duty that the pastors of Christ's flock, in this parish, seek you out that you may, at the hands of the chief pastor of the Diocese, be confirmed in the faith and practice of a Christian childhood. Remember how your difficulties were then made plain, your wavering purposes of holiness confirmed, and your minds enlightened by patient instruction in "all that a Christian should know and believe to his soul's health." And remembering this, tell me if you no longer need any such help—if you are so thoroughly instructed in Divine truth—so strong in your resolutions of godly life—that you need no farther teaching or helpful advice from those who are here for the very purpose of giving it. I cannot think, my friends, that every one in this parish understands all he reads in his Bible; and yet I do not find that any come to us to seek for explanation of what is difficult, or for practical advice as to the manner of carrying Bible principles of conduct into every transaction of business or pleasure. I cannot think that none of

you are ever at a loss how to act, so as to maintain Christian uprightness and consistency, either in your daily work, or in reference to companions with whom you are obliged to mingle in familiar intercourse, or in the discipline of your own thoughts and feelings; and yet how is it, brethren, that these things never reach our ears unless we seek them out? Oh, this should not be. They who have to watch for you, as their spiritual charge, would fain be among you, not only as teachers and ministers, but as your brothers indeed: do you receive them as such, and suffer them to help you.

But look again at the account given in my text, of the converts of Pentecost. *They continued stedfast in the breaking of bread.* Stedfast—mark the word. The ministers of the Church did not find them either forsaking the communion, or coming now and then, at long intervals. Although that sacrament was then administered once a week, yet a Christian would have thought himself disgraced had he gone out at the open door, with the general congregation, and taken no part in the feast of his Lord's dying love. There was no feeling of compulsion then—no coming

two or three times in a year, for the sake of keeping up appearances with their brethren. All was real and earnest. Men repaired to the Holy Supper of the Lord, because there He was verily and indeed present with them; because, though no longer visible to the bodily eye, they could then, by faith, enter into the most blessed and intimate communion with Him. To have shut themselves out from that highest privilege of the Christian would have been regarded by them as an act of the most shameful kind. Here, then, is another point of comparison between you and them. Christ has bidden you to His holy table. He has told you thus to remember His death till He come. He has assured us that He is with us in that sacrament, that in faithfully receiving it we receive Him, that in it we are one with Him, and He with us. Is it true that every one of us to whom He has thus called has continued stedfast in the breaking of bread? Nay, is it true that some have not even begun it? Here, then, is wanting one Scriptural sign of a true and stedfast convert. If the Lord's Supper be not frequented, the sense of its privilege must have fallen very low amongst us: nay, even the duty of obedience in *all* things, must have been lost sight of. For it *is*

an unspeakable privilege, and it is unquestionably an act of obedience. Yet it may be, also, that some erroneous notions are operating to deprive you of a privilege which is yours, to prevent you from rendering that obedience you would fain render if you could.

I know that some refrain from coming to this sacrament, because they do not think themselves *fit* to come. But do you think these converts of the Apostles' times thought themselves fit? Do you not think, rather, from all the records of that period which have come down to us, that they thought themselves utterly unfit to receive any good gift at the hands of God,—that they received this privilege, and all other privileges, as an act of His free grace? And in one sense, indeed, no man is *fit* to communicate; no man can claim it as his right to render God any service, or to receive from Him any spiritual strength through the ordinary channels of His grace. But He gives us, as His servants, that right which we could not claim: He calls us by a yet more impressive name than that. He says that we are not merely His servants, but His friends: and He tells us, that henceforth He will be with us as a friend, even as He was with the chosen Twelve “in the days of His flesh.”

But by being not fit to come to the Holy Communion, perhaps you mean that you are not as good, as obedient, as devoted as you would wish to be, before committing yourself to an act so solemn. It is very possible, indeed, that you are not as good as you have need to be, in the presence of a suffering, and now exalted Saviour; but beware, at the same time, lest you impose terms of admission to His most blessed means of grace, which He has not imposed. The longer you study the New Testament, the more fully, I think, will you be convinced that our Church has made the only requirements which God's Word gives any Church a right to make, in these her words of invitation: "*Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead a new life, following the Commandments of God, walking from henceforth in His holy ways.*" Such are the simple requirements made of all who would draw near to the table of our Lord; and if those who have been confirmed, and have taken the solemn vows they have taken, say they are not able to comply with these requirements, I cannot imagine a more shocking confession. They

have solemnly vowed that they will renounce the world, and the flesh, and the Devil: they have solemnly promised “to keep God’s holy commandments, and walk in the same all the days of their life;” they have adopted the forgiving words of the Lord’s Prayer, and the undoubting language of the Creed, as their own,—is it possible that they can shrink from an act which compels them to declare frequently, the very things they have thus, once for all, publicly declared before God and His Church? No man, indeed, can be admitted to this privilege who is living in any grievous sin; but against such a man, it bears witness that his life is that of one accursed, and separated from God. He is not a Christian, holding fast his union with Christ the Head; but is as a heathen man, self-excluded from the congregation. But, on the other hand, no man should refrain from communicating, from the fear that, some time or other, he may be led into grievous sin. A Christian should not look upon grievous sin as a thing from which he has anything to fear. He need only fear it, if he do not watch, if he do not bring his body into subjection, if he do not diligently use those sacred ordinances

in which God strengthens us for good. He should go forth to temptation, knowing his own bad heart, removing the power of Satan, but yet relying with a fearless trust in Him whom he has chosen for his Lord, who is stronger than himself, who is stronger than the Devil, and who, if he will only watch and pray and strive unceasingly, will surely keep him from falling.

Brethren, I cannot but earnestly urge upon you the plain duty of regularly receiving the Communion of Christ's body and blood. If you have not yet begun, you know not what a check it will be on your conduct, restraining you from your besetting sins of temper and disposition, and setting all your faults and backslidings in array before you,—what a comfort it will be to you amid the cares and griefs of the world,—or how it would encourage you to take up, among your friends and companions, a distinct position of fealty to God, and submission in all things to the Christian rule of well-doing. Not by meek concession to the fears of others, or of your own self, but by trustfully following in the course which your blessed Master has marked out for you—by continuing stedfast “in doctrine and fellowship,”

and in every particular duty arising out of that position—by steady, honourable, manly consistency,—you will put to silence the ridicule of the careless and the opposition of the wicked. Remember *who* is the “Captain of your salvation,” and show, by your conduct in reference to this, that you are of those who are determined, come what may, to fight openly and manfully under His banner.

SERMON IX.

THE HOPELESSNESS OF THE MAN WITHOUT GOD IN THE WORLD.

“Having no hope, and without God in the world.”—Ephes. ii. 12.

IN another epistle, St. Paul uses an expression which at once recurs to our recollection on hearing the text read : *If in this world only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable.* These two statements seem to signalize the antagonism between the heathen and the Christian state, which that Apostle everywhere recognises. The anxious habit of man's mind, which leads him to look before as well as after, renders his a pitiable case, if in these eager forward lookings, he can descry no definite object after which to endeavour, confidence in which may give him tranquillity amid the present tempest of mortal trials, and the fever of imperfectly satisfied anticipations.

And the special wretchedness of the heathen's condition consists in this—that he lives hopelessly and faithlessly in a world of which God is the sovereign ruler and disposer; separated by his want of faith from Him who is the source of his life; unconscious that God has come down among men, to bind them in a firmer and closer relation to Him than even that which they enjoyed at first; fabricating to himself fictitious deities to satisfy his intense longing for the absent God,—and so, unable to take home to his heart the comfortable hopes which faith in a perfectly wise, and loving, and mighty Lord, is calculated to inspire. In the course of life's events, although there is much which can engage him in fitful passing struggles, of a very ardent and impassioned nature, yet he is troubled by a restless sense of change, tending he knows not to what hidden end: he knows not even if to any end at all. As for the future which lies beyond the grave, it looms on him in the far distance like some mysterious and shadowy giant form, which may turn out as he draws nearer, to be but the fabrication of his own straining eyes, which can thus give shape to the formless void; while the present, however ardent

its struggles, however impassioned the emotions they excite, is strangely purposeless and incoherent. He sees, running through it, no one great thought—recognises, in its ceaseless change, no grand controlling law. A definite faith has not given him the point of view which might enable him to unravel its confusion, and to harmonize its apparent contradictions. This, however, is precisely what the Christian *has* gained. That which perishes, and that which endures, are to him alike significant. He sees in the progress and vicissitudes of the world, a perpetual tending to decay of all that is not God's, and yet he sees that righteousness and truth never perish from the earth, and that in the uttermost degradation of men, outcast, and savage, and forlorn, there are struggling with their ignorance and bewilderment certain irrepressible recognitions of the fact, that they live in a world which has for its "Lord and Governor," a Righteous, a True, and Living God.

Without this faith, indeed, it is impossible, except very occasionally and imperfectly, to realise in action the inward conception of a holy and beautiful life. For if these high attributes of God are not certain and eternal things; if the

root of them is not something quite away from the sphere of time and space, and the conditions which limit our present necessary forms of existence; if righteousness and truth may adapt their own character to the shifting views, or the altered associations, of men in different ages of the world; or if the translation of our immortal spirits to another realm of things, far away from our accustomed earthly experience, may affect our hold upon them; it is easy to see how all our endeavours after goodness must be enfeebled by such apprehensions. If there is no guarantee that man may become a righteous being, or continue to be so, how is it to be expected that he should struggle painfully to lay hold on righteousness? The hopelessness of such a state of doubt, must dissolve the vigour and resolution of all spiritual endeavour. Very gladly, therefore, did the first disciples welcome Jesus as a bringer of the good news, that they might thus endeavour, and yet be sure they were doing so, not in vain. But of course, in proportion to the joy which this hope inspired would have been their sadness, had they been doomed to discover at last that there is no continuance of it beyond the grave. To have had such a

hope in them, making life an altogether different and holier thing than it was before; to have conceived, in right of it, the very brightest expectations for the future; and to have found, after all, that these must be buried, with the corrupting body, in the grave—this would indeed have been a profoundly mournful discovery. After sacrificing all things for it—“If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most miserable.” Aye, truly, more miserable even than the heathen: for *they* never had such glimpses of another and a purer life; they never dreamt such enchanting dreams, and can therefore never wake up to such a cruel disappointment.

Yet the case of the heathen, as described in this Epistle to the Ephesians, was plainly, in the Apostle's view, quite sufficiently wretched. They were, in their unconverted state, isolated individuals, with no common point of union; not *men*, members of that great society whom God has knit together in one communion and fellowship—Gentiles, detached nations, with their several lords and kings; not citizens of that blessed kingdom in which God is showing men that, in the truest and most literal sense of all, “He has made

of one blood all nations of the earth :” striving, indeed, after their own fashion, to become nobler and better ; but, alas ! ignorant of that which could alone have made them successful ; “strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” And now, in writing to converts from this state, St. Paul naturally signalizes it as one of the greatest blessings, that they were no longer without hope. The future, to them, was no longer dark and misty ; the present, no longer unintelligible. And, assuredly, brethren, there is no truth of Scripture of which we have had so many affecting confirmations, in the history of our own and other lands, as this—that to destroy man’s faith in God is to bereave him of hope, not only in reference to future salvation, but in reference to present efforts after goodness. I lay great emphasis on the latter part of this statement, as well as on the former ; for assuredly, what men are most slow in learning to believe is, not that God will judge the world hereafter, but that He is even now a living Presence on the earth, discriminating, with rigid impartiality, between right and wrong. I would rather, brethren, speak to you of One who is the

living God, than merely of a Supreme Being; for though men are not reluctant to admit a general presidency over human affairs, what they do not practically admit is, the actual and close relation between God, as a living Person, and their own souls, which must demand, as its immediate consequence, an entire change in their whole manner of ordering their life. It is quite possible to have a general belief in that direction of the laws of nature which we associate with the name of a Supreme Being, without having any practical faith in God whatever. For faith involves an idea of a being with moral attributes; and he who has it must feel that he can *trust* such a God in every circumstance in which he is brought into direct contact with his powers. Far, therefore, from disposing the mind of a real believer to introduce as many media of communication between himself and his God, as possible, it will dispose him to look rather for grounds of confidence in Him, so that he can draw near to Him, and yet not feel afraid of Him. I will therefore use no phrases while speaking to you of Our Father in Heaven, which will encourage any of you in divorcing religion from your common life, or, in deferring till the

near **approach of your** expected entrance into the world of spirits, the **consideration of how you** stand affected towards the Father of your spirits. When I speak of God, it is of one whom you will, indeed, assuredly meet in judgment hereafter; but who is also greeting you in the path, every day; who, by His providence, hedges round your path, so that you find it not an easy thing to break forth into any open course of sin; who, by His voice speaking to you of sin, renders the consciousness of it intolerable to you; who, by His Spirit, strives with your spirit; who is here converting our worst evils into instruments of chastening; causing the curse itself to become the pathway to redemption; and showing you, in every outward event, and every inward experience, that you are, whether with your will or against your will, under God's law and governance, that this world in which you are, is *His* world, and that you, however you may bear yourselves towards Him, are His children. If all this be so, it shows you what a world's wonder every man must be, not only who dies without God, but who *lives* without Him.

But this great principle, that to live without

God is to be without hope, though it cannot be fully illustrated in a single sermon, may yet be made clearer by a few particular examples. We shall be able to exemplify it:

FIRST—In the relative effects of calamity on the godly and the godless man.

SECOND—In their respective endeavours after individual reformation of character.

THIRD—In the spirit in which they respectively address themselves to schemes of social improvement.

FIRST—I need hardly describe to you in what manner the real Christian submits himself to calamity. There is in his reception of it more than submission, for he knows that, though all the sorrowful things in the world result, not from God's order of things, but from a derangement of that order, yet He has never relinquished His sovereignty, and is able, even out of this chaos, to extract the elements of happiness. Because he believes in God, he is never utterly appalled, whatever be the greatness of his calamity. He knows that it is no mere unforeseen accident; that the loving and holy principle which he traces in the history of the world, is traceable also in the

history of each man ; and that, by-and-bye, the merciful design for which this has been suffered to befall him, will be made to appear. It may, perhaps, be for the trial of his faith ; if so, he will “endure, as seeing Him who is invisible.” It may be for the purpose of showing forth to others the victorious power of Christian faith, when brought into contact with the sharpest and bitterest trials ; if so, he will not, by weak sinkings of heart, let his example fail of its effect. And if, at times, the pain appear almost too great for mortal strength, he will not forget the grand resource of every Christian in the hour of trouble. He can repair to the throne of grace, and lay bare all his wants and all his sorrows, before that Divine Intercessor and Saviour to whom the cry of human wretchedness never ascends in vain ; to Him who knows—oh, how well !—what our frame is ; and who remembers that we are dust : and in this he not only relieves his mind of a heavy load, but knows, of a certainty, that he is heard and succoured. His trial may be disease in himself or those dear to him ; or it may be torturing anxiety about his temporal affairs ; or it may be some awful depression of soul, such as the myste-

rious nature of man is often subject to ; or it may be some grievous wound to natural sensibility, some unjust accusation, some unmerited slight, some unrequited affection ; but whatever it be, God will not suffer His tempted and stricken child to suffer more than he is able to bear. There are larger supplies of strength, which He is ready to bestow ; and if not in the *very* way asked for by His afflicted servant, who knows so little of God's ways, yet in *some* way He will set him at liberty when he is in trouble. Such are the resources of His wisdom, and might, and love, that the Christian is never permitted to lose heart. He is not without hope, simply because he is not "without God."

But now, turn to the case of the man who has no such blessed faith to sustain him. What resource in sorrow is there for the man without God ? And here, brethren, I do not mean to refer merely to those who are professed unbelievers, or who speak profanely of Christian rites and ordinances. The number of those who would profess to do this is probably extremely small ; but it is to be feared that there is, in all matters where religion touches practical life, a

very general denial of God on the part of persons in every congregation, however serious their deportment, and however respectful the language in which they speak of religion. I would speak, not only of those who do not meet with us in Church, but of those who carry little or no thought of God with them to their work, observe no regard to Him in their homes, and give Him no place in their hearts. It may be thought that the number of those who live such utterly godless lives is not large; but whether it be large or small is of little concern to us, if it be found that, in any respect, the description comes home to ourselves. We may test the presence of true Christian faith and godly fear in a man's heart, not by his regularity at Church—for there may be many inferior motives at work, causing him not to neglect that—not by the quietness and decorum with which he spends his Sunday—not by any of the marks or tokens of outward devotion, important as they are,—but I would observe him in his family, and see whether God is with him there—whether the daily bread he receives is thankfully acknowledged, as coming from God—whether the Bible is a prized and

holy book to him there—whether his children are trained as Christian children in God's most holy fear, and in humble imitation of Jesus—whether they are taught to acknowledge God in all things, to seek His favour, and to delight in the assurance of His love. I would go with him to his work, and see whether God is with him there—whether, if he have an earthly master to serve, he serves him “with eye-service, as a man-pleaser,” or “in singleness of heart, as unto Christ”—whether the daily temptations to dishonesty are resisted because he fears God, or only because he fears detection—whether the daily temptations to indolence, and the neglect of his master's interests, are resisted because God has warned him to “render to every man his due,” and to be “not slothful in business,” at the same time that he is fervent in “spirit, serving the Lord.” Or, if he be a master, with servants under him, I would observe how he acts by them, whether he is one of those who deal with them in the unerring spirit of gain, or who is as jealous in their behalf as he is in his own, remembering that he is responsible to God, in this matter, as in every other. Or if he be engaged in trade, I would

observe him, in the midst of his buying and selling, and his dealings with his neighbours, and see whether the thought of God accompanies him there, leading him to "provide things honest in the sight of all men," to hate the false balance and the deficient measure, and the every artifice of misrepresentation and fraud, in order that he may do that which is simply just and right in God's sight. And whatever his station, or his manner of life be, I would endeavour to place myself at his side, and watch the habits of his life, and listen to his household words, in which his heart discloses its innermost thoughts and feelings, and see whether a reverent fear of God is there, chastening his thoughts, and purifying his life and his lips from evil and from guile. Especially in the hour of temptation I would mark whether it is to God that he spontaneously betakes himself for help ; and, in the hour of sorrow, whether his faith is still to him like a light shining in a dark place. If, in all those different aspects of life, and on all those occasions when a man is driven in upon himself, and compelled to reveal the real nature of the motives under whose urgency he is acting, and the sources of strength in which he is

trusting—it plainly appears that the man is not really governed by God's law, that he is not influenced by God's fear, that he is not trusting in God's consolation—must we not conclude of such a man, that he is *without God*? If he had real faith in God, could he act as he does? Would it be possible thus to banish the thought of Him from his heart, at the very time when a real believer would turn to Him as his only stay, his only comforter, amid the blackness and darkness of surrounding things? And although it is very true, brethren, that no man can thus follow you all, and watch your several ways, and determine as to the feelings that are in your hearts, and the motives by which you are actuated, yet there is One who actually does this; and not all the lip-service in the world can deceive Him as to what is our real state before Him. The solemn sentence of His word regarding every man is, that if in that busy world where the larger portion of his life and energy is spent, he be without God, he is also without hope. Unlike the hearty believer whose case has been described, when the world fails him, he has lost his only stay. The capital on which he has been trading is withdrawn, and to him *all* is lost. To such a man, the failure of outward prosperity is a fatal and irrecoverable

blow. He is like a ruined gamester, who had hazarded his all on a single disastrous throw. It is not always, indeed, that a single calamity renders a man desperate; for so elastic is the human will, that the hope of rising above present disaster is with difficulty relinquished. A man of this kind will make a vigorous effort to retrieve his position; he will try with all his might to extricate himself from his troubles, and work his way back to the prosperity he had lost. Sometimes such efforts succeed; but cases there are—and we must all, in looking back, be able to recall some such—where these efforts have proved utterly unavailing. Can we be surprised at the awful conclusion in which these despairing efforts have been known to result? Can we wonder that a man, such as has been described, without a God to trust in, living only for this world, when he finds every new project fail, and sees nothing staring him in the face but fresh misfortune and despair, should violently and rashly seek to close a struggle so unprofitable? When we hear of some wretched being who has laid violent hands on his own life, and striven to escape from his griefs by suicide—while, in the charity of our hearts, we would fain describe it as the deed of a diseased

and disordered mind, rather than of a free and rational will, yet, too often in these cases, the real madness was in the false and hopeless principle of the man's whole life—the awful madness of one who, though a creature of God, and entirely dependent on Him for happiness, had sought to hew out to himself sources of happiness in which he might be independent of Him. Such cases are startling confirmations to our minds of the truth, that he who is without God in the world, is also without hope.

But it is not to isolated and exceptional cases, such as these, that we must look for our only illustrations. The experience of the most prosperous, no less than of the most disappointed worldling, would, if we could sound all the depths of his soul, disclose the very same fact. However unconscious of a present God, claiming his heart; however insensible to the appeal made to him by a crucified Saviour; there is yet, in his case, the same dark and threatening future, for which he has no provision laid up, the same consciousness that he must meet God somehow, and at some time, and that he is not prepared to meet Him. He is drifting on to a land and a state of being, as to which he has no definite hopes.

These things, feebly as they have been put, show us most convincingly that to live without God, in a world where all are spiritual, responsible beings, is to choose despair for our portion. As it is not hereafter only, but *here*, that we need have hope in order to strengthen us for the right performance of our various duties, so it is not hereafter only, but *here*, that we must seek to dwell with God, and have Him dwelling with us. But—

SECONDLY—We may consider the case, as it affects individual endeavours after reformation of personal character.

We learn the same truth, often with much pain and sorrow of spirit, in our efforts to break loose from evil habits. How much hope is required in order to render the very first steps in the work of reformation possible—how impossible it is for a mind laid prostrate by despair, to attempt anything effectual for its own deliverance from sin—this the experience of all men sufficiently declares. Mere human resolution cannot stem the tide of turbulent passions, unless it be reinforced by the constraining power of some superior motive. It is never, therefore, until a man has

learned to see clearly that he is not alone in this terrible fight with his own lusts and tendencies of wickedness, but that there is ONE with him who is fighting for him, who will never leave him, from whose love nothing can separate him—that his efforts to become purer and better are made to any good purpose. Strong in the confidence of that, his resolution stands fast, amid all the temptations which beat against it; and, in aid of this, the powerful pleadings of his Saviour's cross come in to overmaster the other and lower influences to which he is exposed. Sometimes, among those who have not finally given themselves to God's service, we find a man—not altogether sunk in sensual apathy, nor altogether abandoned to the pursuit of temporal good—retaining, in the midst of general carelessness, some consciousness of those higher desires and wants which spring out of the necessities of a nature spiritually constituted—displaying, not seldom, a real desire to live above the world and the flesh; yet who is striving, in a self-sufficient spirit, to elevate and purify himself, by means quite independent of Divine aid. It is not possible to look on such a struggle as that without admiration;

but it is an admiration mingled with much sadness. We look with pleasure on him as one not far from the kingdom of Heaven, and wish that, with so much of noble aspiration, he could be taught a more excellent way. It will come to this, that either he must sink down to a lower level, and abandon the hope of being the pure and good being he has aspired to be; or else, he must seek that hope, and find it, where others have sought and found it before, in the assurance that, though his own will is weak and his good desires evanescent, yet God the Holy Ghost is willing to be with him, bringing his will into perfect conformity to God's will, and giving him that victory over the world and over his own self, which in his self-confident, unbelieving efforts, he had sought for in vain.

THIRDLY—We shall find that what is true of the efforts of an individual mind to rise superior to sin, is true also of those schemes of social reformation, on a wider scale, which we see men, from time to time, attempting.

Nothing but an earnest Christian faith on the part of those who make these attempts, can assure

us of their permanence, or give us any hope of their ultimate success. And the Christian bystander, who looks around him, and sees the countless plans for bettering the conditions of his fellows, which unbelievers as well as believers are now forward to propose, is well aware, that this activity of benevolence, in so far as it is real, is the result of that Christian teaching and faith which have happily obtained so large and increasing an influence amongst us. Looking back on the past history of our country and Church, we can remember, that the time when the people were most neglected in body as well as in soul, was a time when Christian faith was almost dead amongst us, so cold and unreal had it become; and when God was forgotten, it was not wonderful that His poor were neglected. When men fell into a low, worldly habit of viewing religion, and the teaching of the Christian mysteries was undervalued, and the spirit of devotion languished, it was natural that men should lose their earnest, living faith, in the presence and protection of God's providence; and that, deprived of this strong motive to exertion, they should cease to work, with any heart, in the cause of social improve-

ment. When the preaching of the cross had come to be considered foolishness by so many, and the unity of Christians in the body of Christ to be but faintly and feebly realised, who can wonder if philanthropic activity languished, and the evils of society, in its obscurer grades, were allowed to grow unchecked? But if you will attempt to recall the names of those true-hearted men by whose strenuous exertions pure religion was once more revived amongst us, and a spirit of missionary zeal again aroused, you will not fail at once to identify some names which must for ever occupy a distinguished place in the more general annals of philanthropic achievement. Nor can this be regarded as an accidental circumstance; for none, assuredly, can be so sensible of the duty they owe to their fellow men, as those who act upon the conviction that "there is a God that judgeth in the earth;" and who believe that neglect of Christ's law of mutual love, will hereafter form the subject-matter of solemn inquiry and retribution. Nor can any be so well emboldened to undertake the difficult task of ministering to social miseries, as those who have a firm confidence that every Christian work, under-

taken in a spirit of trust in God, will be furthered by His invisible help. And nothing can be more certain, than that the various classes of sceptical philanthropists of our own day, wherever they are working earnestly and hopefully for the good of their fellow men, are acting under the influence of a spirit, caught from that religion of God, by whose usages they are surrounded, whose very phrases are continually rising to their lips, from whose chastening, sanctifying presence they cannot escape, and by whose influence their own conduct is much more largely directed than they are willing to believe. Eagerly as they may cast discredit on revelation, and much as they vaunt their own reforms in opposition to it, yet, in so far as these have any power of life in them, they are the offspring of that very Gospel which they decry; and the uniform failure of those attempts to govern human society, which set out by denying the existence of the Supreme Governor, proves to us, in reference to society at large, as well as to its individual members, that if it be without God it is also without hope.

We have thus, brethren, been enabled to trace some remarkable illustrations of the truth an-

nounced in the text; and I have designedly chosen these from the present world, with the view of showing that what gives man courage to bear present evils, or to endeavour after present improvement, must be an earnest faith in God. But there is another terrible struggle awaiting man,—when the body ceases to contend with the encroachments of disease, and the child of God is called to tread solitarily the shadowy passage which is to lead him away from this beloved world, never again to return. All the thoughts of busy life, all its varied experiences, all the charities of social intercourse, all things which have hitherto wrapped the senses in delight, or furnished matter for the mind's happiest exercise: all these things are now passing from his sight. Oh, the passionate love of life! oh, the dismal shrinking from the grave! oh, that fierce final struggle with the last enemy! What man is there, however strong his trust in God, who does not cower and shrink at such a moment, and stretch out eager beseeching hands for help and deliverance? But, ah! the hopeless case of the godless man in the hour of death!—no comforting sense of a Father near, hearing and pitying his alarms—no gladdening con-

sciousness of the Saviour's nearness, and sympathy, and support, can avail in his behalf. He who could alone help at such a moment, is that One of whom the dying man is terribly afraid. He would not have Him near if he could. The very thought of being brought face to face with Him is the nightmare which has been haunting all his most terrific dreams. If he could but believe that Christ has brought him nigh, it would be well; but, wanting that faith, his is a case which one cannot bear to think of. Brethren, I do beseech you to think what is the ground of *your* hope. It will never be such a hope as you can dare either life or death with, unless the love of Christ has brought you nigh to your Father. "It is He that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is ever sat down at the right hand of God." Well for you it will be if you can declare with St. Paul, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

SERMON X.*

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY AND STEWARDSHIP.

(Third Sunday in Advent.)

“ Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.”—1 Cor. iv. 1.

ON this, the third Sunday in Advent, a special subject arrests our attention, in which we have all a common interest. It is, the special function of those who have been sent, or may be sent, to minister in the congregation, the duties which properly belong to them, and the spirit in which they should be regarded by those whose servants they are “ for Jesus’ sake.” Very soon the bishops and pastors of Christ’s flock, who “ have authority given them in the congregation, to call and send ministers into

* Preached in Trinity Church, Tunbridge Wells.

the Lord's vineyard," will again proceed to the solemn work of trying and proving those **who** shall offer themselves as **candidates for that** responsible office; and **already we have** joined in prayer to the **Lord Jesus** Christ, in the spirit of this **Advent season**, that the ministers and **stewards** of His mysteries may be found diligently preparing an acceptable and obedient people for Him at His second coming. It would obviously be most unseemly if—while all the other relations in which Christians stand to one another (for instance, those of parents and children, husband and wife, magistrate and citizen, and the like) are fully explained and illustrated,—the relation subsisting between pastor and people should be the only one omitted from our public instructions. Nor does there seem any one occasion on which this subject could be discussed with greater advantage than now, when we are entering on a fresh Christian year, and are therefore anxious to reconsider all the habits and purposes of our life, and to frame anew such godly resolutions as we shall see to be needful for the Christian ordering of our life, in its every duty and relation.

On the one hand, it cannot but be profitable for those whose duty it is to guide you, as God shall enable them, in the ways of holiness, to call to mind, and admonish their own hearts, what a tremendous responsibility *that* is which is attached to the stewardship of the Divine mysteries, and to the guardianship of immortal souls. On the other hand, brethren, it is well that you, too, should consider what duties are required of you—the fervent prayers, the willing aid, the spirit of hearty and loving co-operation in all good works which you are required by God to render to them; as well as—what is hardly less important—that you should ask in what state of mind you receive the instruction addressed to you here,—whether you are of those who “hear meekly God’s word, and receive it with pure affection, and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit.”

The Apostle, speaking to the Corinthians, says, “Let a man so account of us as ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.” Circumstances had arisen which made it necessary for him, in his day, to reiterate this declaration. There was a growing disposition to consider Christ’s servants, who ministered to the Corinthian

congregation, in some other light than that obvious one, of men called and sent among them, bearing their high commission as Christ's ambassadors, not on account of any merit in themselves, but of His free and infinite grace. Thus they were all on a level, except in so far as some might be called to higher functions than others, and were to be estimated, not on account of any natural gifts they might happen to possess, but on account of that office which they held of God, and of that work which they were to do for Him. The very idea of a Christian minister is that of one who has renounced all trust in his natural power to do this or that, who has received his commission to "feed the flock of God" as an unmerited gift from on high, and who goes forth to his work in a strength which is not his own. The Corinthians, however, seem to have lost their hold on this idea. They had got back to their old confidence in natural gifts; they had begun to separate, in thought, the men from the commission they held; and to rally round their favourite teachers, in a factious spirit, as their individual taste or fancy might guide them. No state of things could be conceived more hostile than this to a spirit of

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sincere and humble piety ; none more calculated to foster a habit of unloving criticism ; none more entirely at variance with that Christian love of which St. Paul elsewhere tells us, that without it, the most laudable deeds, and the most coveted spiritual gifts, profit us nothing. That the Apostle himself, though chosen to his office in such a manner as were none others of those whose names they had abused for factious purposes, should have lost his proper influence in a community such as this, was not wonderful. His great deeds done for God, and the beautiful simplicity of his faith, would, among people of such tendencies, weigh little against the fact that " his bodily presence was weak, and his speech contemptible." But there seems reason to fear that they went much farther than this, and that even the blessed name of Christ was blasphemously bandied about amongst them, as one of the many leaders of the factions into which their community was split. Even St. Paul, as the Apostle who had brought them the good news of salvation, and formed them into a Christian community, might have claimed some respect and affection from them.

Yet, though we might understand the fickleness of men in reference to an individual minister,

we should have expected, that into the most infatuated contests of party, the name of Christ would never have been introduced, except as the great God and their Saviour. It appears, however, that while one said, "I am of Paul;" and another, "I am of Apollos;" and another, "I, of Cephas,"—there was also another faction, which said, "I am of Christ."* The simplicity of the Gospel of our Lord had lost its charms for them; and the manifest tendency of the community was towards the destruction of the Church of Christ, and the substitution for it of different schools of Christian philosophy. The effect of this, even as regards doctrine, would have been to deprive Christianity of all that was especially and distinctively characteristic of it; and to weave around its saving truths, a mist of vague language, which every one might interpret according to his own inclination or caprice. The importance of the crisis did not escape the watchful eye of the Apostle; and he now reappears among them, by this letter addressed to them, to recall them to the simplicity of their earlier faith—to expose the

* It does not appear that this last party were mentioned with more approbation than the rest. They were more guilty, inasmuch as they profaned the holiest name in the world, to factious purposes.

folly of their confidence in man, and their seeking after human wisdom—and to preach anew to them that great truth, without which the Christian religion would be a mere knowledge, and not a faith. It is thus that he contrasts the true spirit of the Christian minister, with that of merely learned and philanthropic guides :—“ I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” It was that blessed and victorious Name, which has ever been found most effectual in subduing the wild passions of the world, with which the Apostles, in the early days of the Church, were wont to go forth among Jews, among Greeks, and among the barbarous nations of the earth ; and true to the spirit of the old prediction, immediately the roughest places became smooth, and the loftiest hills of difficulty were leveled with the plain. It was ever in the view of the cross—which was thus set forth before them—that men learned at once their own nothingness and their source of strength. Burdened with sin and remorse, they found there, in the

awful spectacle of a suffering Saviour, the living echo of many secret misgivings; and, loudly threatened as they were by the voice of conscience within, forecasting the shadow of punishments and miseries to come, many a heathen was led to flee to Him who is able to "save to the uttermost all that come to God by Him." To the Jews, indeed, sunk under the thralldom of a haughty prejudice, and deluded by the promises of many a forged tradition, the name of Christ might easily prove "a stumblingblock." To the Greeks, in the pride of their wisdom, amid the theories of their schools and their sages, and looking on any new revelation of God's will, as but one among the many schemes of philosophy—it was not unnatural that the doctrine of Christ crucified, should appear "but foolishness." Yet there were many, both among Jews and Greeks, whose yearnings after forgiveness and communion with God, neither the empty boast of the Jew, nor the barren speculation of the Greek, could satisfy. In these, the Holy Ghost found fit recipients for the faith; and in them Christ was found to be "the power of God and the wisdom of God; because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the

weakness of God is stronger than men." It was the good news of salvation by the Life, and Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, that the Apostle had declared to them, no new phase of truth merely, no scheme of philosophic belief, but the truth of God itself, in which is "wisdom unto salvation." It was as an ambassador for Christ, and as such alone, that he presented himself to them: nor was it for his heroic courage, or his stores of learning, or the wonderful powers of reasoning which his vigorous mind had brought to bear on the Christian evidence, that he expected they should receive him, and hold him in esteem. His desire—his simple desire was, that he should be considered as a minister of Christ, laying "none other foundation than that is laid in Christ Jesus." Had the Corinthians *thus* accounted of the ministerial office, it would have been impossible for them to carry the spirit of faction to such a painful and blasphemous extreme.

In the epithets here applied to the pastors of Christ's flock—whether apostles, elders, or deacons—the first idea suggested, is that of the *derived* nature of all their powers and privileges. They possess nothing—no gift, no authority, no

talent, no aptness to teach, no commission to feed the flock of God, or to dispense the means of grace; which they have not first received from above; and therefore they have nothing whereof they ought to glory. Yet it is to be clearly observed, that, great as is the characteristic humility of the Apostle, there is one point which he absolutely refuses to concede, on his own behalf, and that of his brethren. He will be less than the least in the esteem of all men; but as a great trust has been confided to him, which he must not neglect, he will not allow men to account of him and his brethren in any other light than as Christ's ministers, and the stewards of his manifold grace. And this, my brethren, is the one respect in which we, in these latter days, would stand by the dignity of our order. The advantages of worldly position form no part of the calling of the Christian minister; and as far as they are concerned, it is his business, as it is that of other Christians, to take up his cross, and follow his Master. It is on far other grounds, and in relation to far different circumstances, that we are called to magnify our office. That office, we freely confess, has in itself no claim to outward glory or honour; nor are

such distinctions, even when accidentally connected with it, to be weighed against the love of the Christian brethren, to those who are over them in the Lord. Neither has the office we hold any mysterious and viceregal powers, in respect of which it can overawe the feelings of mankind. It is no sacerdotal priesthood elected to stand between God and man, and empowered to give forth *arbitrary* laws of faith and conduct; nor is it invested with any authority to pronounce the forgiveness of sins, except as God's word doth allow, or to dispense with the ancient and everlasting sanctions of morality. The minister of God can therefore surrender all claim to outward distinction without feeling the value of his ministry impeached; while, as regards the superstitious veneration with which his office in darker days was regarded, he would shrink from that as an awful impiety and sin. It is his to forget himself, and think chiefly of what is due to the Master he serves; and in devoting himself to the sacred calling, he has but mocked his God if his choice have not been founded on the very principle of renouncing all worldly objects of pursuit.

There were, indeed, in apostolic and primitive

times, circumstances, no longer existing now, which might have justified larger pretensions. It was a perilous thing to be even a Christian; and in that fight with heathenism where all were in peril, the chief post of danger was occupied by the Church's ministers. And thus the Apostle, had he been so disposed, might have very reasonably urged his claims to higher honours. He might have argued, that if it be the chief end and the highest dignity to which man can aspire, to glorify God by the faithful following of Christ, to walk with God by the utter abnegation of self, surely that man must be, in the eyes of all the world, most sublimely and solemnly exalted, who has deserted the glittering path of fame, and placed his life in peril, and renounced the pursuits of human ambition, and given himself to the labours of the Lord's vineyard, and consecrated his every power, and his whole life to the Redeemer's glory. In the case of the Apostles, in those days of early and severe trial, language like this might have been not unreasonable: on our part, who have incurred no such risks, and been called to no such overwhelming sacrifices, it would be simply preposterous; and his silence on such a point, is in itself a striking fact, which teaches

all those who are disposed unduly to exalt the claims of their office, a most salutary lesson of humility.

While surrendering, then, all those false claims to distinction, we are called to observe what is the true character in which the work of the Christian minister is to be regarded. . It is at once a ministry and a stewardship—a ministry in Christ's name, and a stewardship of His treasure. The one term, reminding us of Him in whose name we are called to this service, reminds us also of the humility, and diligence, and patience, incumbent on those who have been called to it: the other points out the nature of the blessings to be dispensed, which are, the mysteries of God, and the responsible character of the charge, here described as a stewardship. It is thus only, brethren, that we would seek to minister to you in holy things; regarding ourselves as your servants, for Jesus' sake; yet endeavouring, by the faithful and diligent ministry of the word and of the sacraments, to be faithful to the stewardship committed to us.

And now, brethren, you too have your interest and your duty in this matter. How do you stand

affected by it? As the result of this ministry, which God in his good providence has sent to you, ever since you can remember anything, which began at your baptism, and has never since entirely ceased—your whole circumstances are changed, and your everlasting condition affected, for weal or woe. You were, in your infancy, brought to God's house, and there you were signed with the sign of the cross, in token that thereafter you should not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified. You have ever since been reared in the faith which was thus early professed for you; and many a time you have been reminded of the duty incumbent on you of confirming those early vows by your own deliberate act, at a maturer age. All have had an opportunity of being taught to understand the Holy Scriptures; many have been confirmed, and of these, not a few have become partakers of the Holy Communion of the body and blood of Christ. You have thus not only been taught Christian truth as a heathen congregation might be taught it, but this teaching has been illustrated and confirmed in the most solemn and practical manner, by those rites of the Church which have

been administered to you. You have not only learned who and what Christ and His service mean, but you have also, by profession, "put on Christ;" and thus you have all, in the plain and natural sense of the words, become the people and congregation of God. It is therefore our business, as his ministers, to address you, not only as a congregation of human beings with immortal souls, for whose safety we must watch, but as a congregation of men and women, who, by repeated and deliberate acts, have professed yourselves Christians; to remind you of all that is involved in this solemn declaration, and what ought to be the character and conduct of those who make it; and to warn you of the fearful guilt and the fearful risk you must incur if you should unhappily sin against so much light, and make so many means of grace of none effect. And thus, too, you discover that it is not for you now to choose whether you will serve God or no — that choice has already been made for you by One far holier and wiser than you, even by Him whose will no man may dispute, and yet go unpunished. God would not have brought you hither; He would not have sent to you the ministry

of the word and sacraments; He would not have called you into his Church, and elected you to Christian privileges,—unless He had already chosen for you, so that no power of choice is now left for yourselves, that you *must* serve Him; that as you are Christians in name, and in responsibility, so you must be Christians in deed and in truth, in holiness of life, in consistency of conduct, in the cultivation of all those affections and graces which adorn and beautify the Christian character.

Thus, brethren, the fact brought before you to-day of a Christian stewardship charged with the duty of dispensing to you the treasures of Christ's truth, brings to every man's conscience once more, the great practical question, whether he has received that treasure or has despised it, and refused to receive it; whether, through the diligent use of the Christian means of grace he has been truly growing in grace; whether, by the ministry to him of God's word, which ever testifies of Christ, he has found Christ for himself, and is living in habitual imitation of Him; or whether, by the averted heart and cold affections he has brought to God's worship, it has to come to pass that the more the means of grace have pled with him, the more

his heart has hardened itself against them; so that they are becoming even now to him a savour of death unto death. But also, my brethren, I would remind you, in conclusion, of the other truth which has been brought before you—not merely of a stewardship, with a treasure to be dispensed, but of a ministry of Christ, in active operation amongst you. Of such a ministry, in any circumstances, we may well say—who is sufficient for these things? But in our own case, placed as we are in the midst of a rapidly increasing population, and called to deal with circumstances of no ordinary difficulty, the sense of insufficiency is more than usually painful. And though our sufficiency can only come from God, yet much may be done by you to lighten our hearts and to strengthen our hands for the great work in which we are engaged. At the very least we have a right to expect that no unnecessary obstacles shall be thrown in our way, which may have the effect of preventing the word and doctrine of God from having free course. Since “it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful,” we may surely expect that our efforts to be so will not be resented, because they may wound the self-love of some, or but imperfectly

meet the requirements of others. Often, indeed, our endeavours to benefit those committed to us may be very blindly made; they may often be made with great misunderstanding of the characters with which we are endeavouring to deal; and in all that is done by those at least of your pastors who have had a comparatively short experience of the duties and difficulties of the pastoral life, there may be much immaturity of conception and many imperfections of practice; but it should at least be remembered, that the efforts we make for the spiritual benefit of those committed to our care are made under the compulsion of an urgent sense of duty, and with a deep and agonizing conviction of the greatness and responsibility of our charge. So that if it be, as none will deny that it is, the duty of private Christians, in their ordinary dealings with one another, to "forbear one another in love," I may surely claim for those who are over you in the Lord, a still larger share of forbearance, a still more considerate regard for their peculiar difficulties, and a still more kind and generous construction of actions which may admit of both a charitable and an uncharitable interpretation. And if, sometimes, you are

painfully reminded, as doubtless you will often be, that they who have to minister to you in holy things, are weak, and sinful, and erring men, oh, remember that they feel this most deeply themselves; that they go forward to their work "in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling;" and that if it be indeed so, they only so much the more need your prayers. If you see in them defects which may render them less successful in grappling with surrounding difficulties, then, consider, brethren, that it is your part not to sit in judgment upon them, but rather to lift up your heart in secret prayer to God the Holy Ghost that He would furnish them more and more thoroughly for their work; that He would of His infinite goodness defeat every blind and misdirected effort of theirs, and crown with His richest blessing their every wiser endeavour after the furtherance of His glorious cause. And, while thus praying for them in a spirit of Christian love; while esteeming them for the sake of their work and their office; see that you be not wanting, either, in practical marks of your sympathy with them in the spiritual labours to which they are called. So far as you can engage with them in these labours,

without invading the order of the Church, and bringing confusion into her work, be always ready to do so. In the visitation of districts, in the teaching of Sunday schools, in the supply of the funds needed for carrying on our various operations, and in the constant manifestation of deep and hearty interest in these things, even where you cannot actually help, show that we are one Family, united to one another in Christ our common Head; and that there can be no labour of one member of it which is not also matter of deep concern to all the rest. Remember, above all things, brethren, that the cause in which your ministers labour, is not their cause, but God's. And, while they seek not to be slothful ministers or drowsy watchmen; while they seek to hold back no part of God's saving truth, and to be wanting in no effort to carry it home to men's consciences—see that you are ready, each as you may, to join in this good work, that so you incur not the peril, nor suffer the punishment, of those who refuse to “come to the help of the Lord against the mighty.”

Brethren in the common faith and love of our loving Lord, suffer this word of exhortation.

Sometimes, at the commencement of any new period of life, some apparently chance word spoken in season, is able to give a tone to the whole of it. And if the spirit in which I have striven to speak to you to-day, be that in which we all together—pastors and people—proceed to the holy work of this Christian year, on which we have entered, there need be* no bound to the joyful anticipations with which we shall address ourselves to the work of battling with the wickedness of our own hearts, and of the surrounding multitudes; for then we may hope that, banded together by a strong bond of Christian love and unity, heart will kindle heart to yet higher and nobler effort; the disputes and heartburnings which torment every community

* The resignation of the living by the then Incumbent of Tunbridge Wells, the Rev. J. N. Pearson, before that Christian year was out, prevented the full realisation of these hopes. Yet, remembering how he sympathized in them at the time they were expressed, the writer is sure that he will not less earnestly unite with him now, in humble prayer to Almighty God, that they may be as abundantly realised, under the new ministry, to whose care his people have been committed.

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like ours will seem, in our eye, day by day, increasingly mean and sordid ; we shall help each other, while living in the world, to live above it ; and God, looking with favour upon us, will prosper us in all to which we set our hands, and, in our various endeavours to serve Him, will pour upon us the continual and abundant dew of His blessing.

SERMON XI.

A SELF-SEEKING RELIGION DESTRUCTIVE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE.

“I know thy works, that thou hast a name, that thou livest and art dead.”—St. John’s Epistle to the Church of Sardis.

THE Epistle to the Seven Churches of Proconsular Asia, is addressed to every variety of character and social life; but the later ones evidently refer to a state of society like our own; in which, amid numerous signs of high culture and an advanced stage of civilization, we do not discover any signs of similar, or at least proportionate, advancement in the power and purity of the Christian life. It may be said, indeed, that the lessons of the Christian life are few in number, and are soon learned, and that it is not reasonable to expect advancement in the knowledge and the practice of what is in itself incapable of advancing. We are able to multiply the facts of

science, because as yet our knowledge of it is incomplete: we are able year by year to add to those discoveries which enable us to turn the inanimate things of nature to higher and more profitable uses, because we are, in fact, only by slow degrees becoming acquainted with their properties, and their power to minister to our comfort. Every succeeding age is in advance of that which went before it, in its treasury of acquired truths, and its store of useful arts; and as this has been the invariable experience of the past, we have every reason to expect it will be the experience of the future also. We can, indeed, fix no limit to the progress of either discovery or civilization; but as respects religion, the case is altogether different. Its truths are few in number, and fixed; we can neither take from them nor add to them; and this is true also of its duties. Both truths and duties were as fully known in the earliest ages as they are now: all circumstances were then as favourable to a clear understanding and an earnest practice of them; there is no reason, therefore, to expect that one age should exhibit a more advanced Christianity than another. To bewail, then, over the want of

a proportionate development in the sphere of Christian life, to that which you observe, in your own day, in the sphere of common life, and in the appliances for intellectual culture and material comfort, is simply to be unreasonable. It is to expect the repetition of the same features in things which are essentially different.

And no doubt, brethren, if we were to expect any addition to the elementary facts of Christianity, because we live in a highly cultivated and thinking age, we should be very unreasonable ; if we were to expect the discovery of new Christian laws, of a higher order, because we live in a period when the arts of refinement are being greatly multiplied, we should make the sad mistake of thinking that religion is a thing of man's device, and that a revelation from Heaven is not complete without the philosophic refinements of human thinkers. This mistake has been made by many, in every age ; but never more frequently, or with more disastrous results, than in the age in which we live. Such results as these we have seen in Romanist developments on the one hand, and Rationalistic refinements on the other.

But it is not of such an advancement on the

Christianity of previous times that I have been speaking, as lamentably wanting in our own. The waters at which we would drink, and satisfy our souls' profound want, are still the ever-living streams of inspiration flowing from the Word of God. The rock on which we would build, is still that good foundation, other than which no man can lay—even Jesus Christ. The truths which we would believe to the saving of our souls, are still those, and those only, which God in old time charged his servants to proclaim to all the world; and the duties which alone we wish to practise, are those which naturally spring out of a willing subjection to the law of Christ—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against which there is no law.

The kind of advancement of which I have spoken, as one which should at least keep pace with the progress, in other respects, of an age of high civilization, relates, not to the knowledge of Christian truths and duties, but to the conception of the one, and the practice of the other. Even in human works there would be no progress, were there not something more than merely a retention of knowledge as to particular arts; but besides

knowing how the thing can be done, there must also be a constant practice of it, so as to insure a higher skill; and were this practice discontinued, the skill would be lost. And so it is, also, in things divine. If, instead of putting forth all the energy that is in them, in the effort to carry out their own idea of the Christian life, men merely content themselves with a round of formal duties, in which they care not to excel, if only they can escape reproof and punishment, they are in this, very like the artisan who listlessly and mechanically copies some work before him, without caring as to the degree of perfection he reaches in his work, if only he can get it done, and be paid for it when it is done. And what I meant to indicate to you, brethren, was this, that whereas we live in an age when all who cultivate the useful arts of common life, are distinguished by a spirit as remote from this as possible; when the multiplying exhibitions, and schools of design, and the like, manifest the spirit of earnestness which is brought to bear on every department of art and manufacture, on all that can multiply outward comforts, or minister to the sense of beauty,—yet the Christian practice of the age—in

strange contrast to this—is for the most part so mechanical and formal: as compared with the first age of Christianity, we have not advanced, and are not advancing.

If we would look for a reason for this, we may find it in the fact, that religion is now regarded too much with reference to the individual gain which a man is to reap from it for eternity. We do not find that the first Christians thus regarded it. When they sought their Saviour, it was not merely in a sordid hope of safety, but because there was that within them; that sense of contradiction; that revolt from God's law; that longing for peace with God; that desire for a law of life to which they could subject themselves, and in subjection to which they could find spiritual rest; which made them glad to take Christ's yoke upon them. His yoke they felt they could gladly bear, and the burden He laid upon them was as naught, compared with that under which they had hitherto groaned. Not *only* because hell yawned for them, and the gulf of unutterable woe was ready to receive them, if they should not repent—did they seek in Christ a Saviour. For this, indeed, as well as for other great works of deliverance, they

afterwards learned to thank Him. After they had come to Him, it deepened their love to Him, and strengthened their fidelity to their choice, to see, as they did see, every day more and more clearly, that He had not only brought them present peace, but saved them also from the uttermost depths of future misery. So will it be with all sin-laden and sorrow-stricken souls who turn to the same Divine helper; yet none the less was it true, that their first movements towards Him were impelled by far different thoughts. They did not go to Christ the Lord, only in the hope of some future reward, still less, as scared by the apprehension of some future possible evil; but also, and far more, because there was in them, at the present, a something from which they wished to flee away, a sense of wrong-doing, a consciousness of far deeper evil in their nature than any that human means could enable them to redress; a feeling that they had great need of help, together with a certainty that they had no power of themselves to help themselves; a weariness and heavy ladenness of soul from which He, and none but He, could give them rest. And thus, as in the case of the Psalmist, their first thoughts, after they had fought their way to repentance and faith, were not thoughts of self-

gratulation at their escape from that future pit of misery into ~~which the wicked~~ shall be cast, but rather of escape from the present ~~oppression~~ of fears and troubles which already they found to be so real a source of misery. They rejoiced, not merely at the thought of the future anthems of praise which in the angel-world they should join to raise to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb, but they rejoiced because their God and Saviour had *already* put a new song into their mouth ; that He had lifted them out of that horrible pit of sin and self-accusation of which they had had actual experience ; and out of that " miry clay " in which they would have sunk yet deeper and deeper down, in hopelessness and despair, but for His merciful intervention ; and that he had set their feet upon a rock, from which no power on earth could dislodge him.

And thus, brethren, it happened that the first Christians, not dealing with their Saviour and His promises in that spirit of worldly calculation which too much characterizes the modern religion of Christendom, not only had a *name* to live but actually *lived*. It was with no thought of merely escaping wrath to come that they had fled to an

offered Saviour; it was with no thought of getting eternal life that they had obeyed His bidding to follow in the path He had marked for them by His stains of blood; yet they did escape the one, they did become assured of the other. It was enough for them, that he to whom they had gone was a very Christ, no false Christ, no man come to cheat them with delusive dreams of redemption from sin, and reconciliation with the supreme Centre of the universe; but THE CHRIST, presenting in himself all that the false redeemers and reconcilers had pretended to but failed to realise. Very God of very God, very man of very man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting—entire in His union with their own nature, entire in His union with God's also—in whom at least, sacrificed upon the cross, mercy and truth had met together, righteousness and peace had kissed each other. It was such a Redeemer as this who alone could deliver them and the world from the anomalous and sinful state in which they were; and this they felt to be sufficient without weighing in the scales of a worldly calculation, the precise and accurate value of the good things He had in store for them, without considering what

was the smallest cost of personal devotion at which these could be obtained.

Such was the character, my brethren, of the religion of those earliest Christians who had more than merely a name to live. Let us, then, contrast with this the state of the Church of Sardis, and of ourselves; and see whether we cannot account for a change so lamentable as that shadowed forth to us by the language of our text. You have already seen that one great temptation which beset the Churches of that province was the temptation to join in idolatrous practices. Now they were tempted into it by the softness of luxurious indulgence; and now they were terrified by the tortures of an inhuman persecution. But the mere threat of persecution often puts men, as we may say, on their mettle; calls up whatever rugged and determined qualities of opposition they may possess; and thus the trial, when it comes, fails of its effect. Besides the religious feeling which calls upon the Christian to condemn suffering when the choice is between that and faithlessness to Christ, there is a natural love of excitement which leads men to court danger rather than to avoid it, and a natural admiration of self-sacrifice

in its more heroical forms, which have often combined to strengthen a weak faith rather than to put it to flight. It is therefore not surprising to find, as we do from contemporaneous history, that the temptations which told with far the greatest power against a stedfast faith, in the Church of Sardis, were those which came in the softer and more pleasant form of indulgence and sensual pleasures. The people of Sardis had an unhappy notoriety for their voluptuous and self-indulgent character; and as idolatry specially addressed itself to such characters, contriving for them every species of gratification which the Christian law condemned, a difficult question soon arose. As in Thyatira the question had been how far concession to the idolatrous rites enjoined by the Roman law were allowable for Christians; so here the question was as to the extent of pleasurable indulgence which might be enjoyed without the forfeiture of the Christian character. There was not here, as in the case of the Thyatiran Church, any one false teacher like Jezebel, placing herself on the side of the dominant pagan power, and advocating unchristian concessions to it, from fear of persecution; but here there were ranged on the side of the

devil-worship of the heathen, all possible forms of seduction by which the soul could be tempted through the flesh, and those resolutions of fidelity which persecution would only have nerved with new strength, dissolved amid the softness of a pampered and voluptuous life. It is but too evident that these temptations met with a large measure of success. There were but few names in Sardis which had not defiled their garments; and in this there must have been double defilement. There was defilement even in the consent of idolatry; but how much was this aggravated by the intrinsic pollution of the heathen observances! This could have arisen in but one way. They had "a name to live;" but they did not treat that name as if it were a living power. They had probably got into the worldly way of dealing with Christian things, as matter of mere gain or loss to their individual souls. They did not believe, or they did not act as if they believed, in their membership of Christ's mystical Body. Perhaps they were intent only on making sure of their own safety. Perhaps that one idea of a judgment-seat prepared, and a future doom darkening on, had so seized hold of their imagination, that they could think only of

escaping wrath to come. What things must they do, and what things give up doing, in order to make their calling and election sure? Such were perhaps the questions which mainly agitated their minds. And if this were indeed so, it is quite sufficient to account for the lamentable result. Beginning, in the endeavour after the spiritual life, with thoughts of self, self would occupy the chief place in their thoughts, in all its subsequent stages. When temptations to gratify the love of pleasure—sensual, sinful pleasure—which is so deeply rooted in human nature, were presented to them, instead of at once turning away from all such suggestions as unfit for those who were citizens of a new and heavenly kingdom, they would begin to consider only how far self might be allowed to indulge in present gratifications without a total loss of happiness in the end. And thus their motives to pure and holy living would miserably degenerate. When the selfish hope of happiness became the mainspring of all they did, either in reference to earth or heaven, they would be quite unarmed against the sophistries with which a mind enamoured of things present, and only frightened at the thought of things to come,

can make the worse appear the better course. Paltering with conscience, and hesitating between desire and fear, the voice of passion would soon become too clamorous for resistance, and they would come to believe, that the present pleasure might be enjoyed, and yet the everlasting safety not be endangered. Now then, brethren, applying the example of them of Sardis to ourselves, what warning may we take from this view of their conduct?

Every one here, I suppose, would fain be a Christian. If not in the deepest sense of that word, yet every one, I suppose, would rather be accounted by God as a Christian than not. But how do we estimate the Christian character? Do you think that he is most of a Christian who is most anxious about his soul, or has the most assured conviction of its safety? So far, indeed, as such an one has realised more than another the existence of a spiritual world, and the awful solemnities that environ him on every hand, we may regard him as having made at least one great step towards true Christian faith. But this anxiety about his soul, and this conviction of its safety, is not of itself a proof that the man is a

Christian—a Christian, I mean, in the large and real sense which every one understands. It is self he is thinking of most; and the real Christian is that man from whose heart the thought of self is nearly, if not entirely, cast forth. St. Paul was a Christian more than such a man, even when he said that at which so many Christians of the modern type have shuddered, as if there were in it something horrible and profane, that he could wish himself accursed from Christ, for the sake of his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh. He never said that he could wish himself separated from Christ. That thought never suggested itself to him as possible. He was “persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature,” would “be able to separate him from the love of God, which was in Christ Jesus his Lord.” But what he meant was, that, in so far as the hope of reward, or the freedom from punishment was concerned, He was prepared to sacrifice all, and to endure all, if only he could bring his countrymen and kinsmen into that love of Christ which had diffused so divine a joy

through his own soul. The more we study the highest and purest examples of Christian devotedness, the more we shall find that Christian faith with them meant not merely a confident conviction of their own safety, through Christ's sacrifice, but also such a love of Him and confidence in Him, as thè author of *all* good, as led them to an entire self-abandonment. They went to Him, not only for life's sake, but for His own sake ; they resorted to Him, not only as the dispenser of the highest happiness in the heavenly world throughout eternal ages, but for the sake of that infiniteness of goodness and blessedness which flowed to them directly from Himself, in every act of personal communion with Him, and in all the ordinances of His Church. The difference, therefore, between the two classes of men is, that whereas the one repairs to Christ because he verily believes that through Him alone can he be saved from everlasting death ; the other goes to Him because in Him he sees the desire of his soul, and because in union with Him alone can be found aught that is worthy the name of life. The one course is apt to lead to selfish paltering between duty and inclination, until at last only "a name to live" is left ; the other tends to lead a man out of himself, to realise

his position as a member of Christ and His mystical body, to crush down the incitements of selfish desire of all kinds, and to love, not only for himself, but for them also who with him are members of the same body, and for that Blessed Saviour above all, who, by His cross and passion, has given him a key to the spirit in which all work for him should be done.

And what I would now, from all this, desire to enforce on you, brethren, is that you have every one of you a *name* to live. You have *that*, at the least, and how much more than that you may have depends very much on yourselves. You are not the children of wrath, but of grace. You bear on you the worthy name of that Saviour whom really and truly to know is life—life now, and life for evermore. In your baptism you have been taken out of the wild stock of the world, and grafted into the true vine; and, connected as you are with Him who is the vine, even Jesus Christ, you have undoubtedly the name of living. The time of pruning has not come; and the useless branches have not been lopped off, and cast away: you still, therefore, retain a visible and real union with Him through whom alone true life can come

to you. But, for all that, in God's sight, you may be dead. As the useless branches are not cut off and cast away until the time of pruning comes, so you will not be finally severed from Him, and cast away from His presence, till death and the ingathering of souls to their account. If you be altogether like a dead branch, in which there are neither leaves nor fruit, then the end of these is to be burned, and *your* end will be to be sent away from His presence whose smile makes Heaven glad. But if it be not quite thus with you ; if, though there be no fruit, or not much fruit, yet there is some faint indication that your case is not yet quite hopeless—remember what God's discipline is with such as these. "He purges them that they may bring forth more fruit," that the Christian faith which they profess to have received into their hearts may be found exerting a more sensible influence on their temper, and disposition, and power of self-government. "Be watchful, then, and strengthen the things which remain, which are ready to die," if, indeed, if it be true of thee, my brother, that thy works have not been found perfect before God ; strengthen the union there is between thee and thy Saviour

by all those gracious helps and props which His earthly vineyard contains. Seek communion with Him in His holy sacraments, in every means of grace He has sent you, in reading often of His gracious words and deeds, in praying much and earnestly for the Holy Spirit's blessed operations. Let this last be especially your resource ; for see, to encourage you to that, in the beginning of this message, he reminds you that He it is who has this gift to bestow. "These things saith He that hath the seven spirits of God." He will give His Holy Spirit, in all His manifold operation, to them that ask Him ; and if you thus ask and receive, you will no longer have merely a *name* to live ; and, though you had been much weakened in the spiritual life by your contact with the world, yet this will never be remembered against you. He will not blot your name out of the Book of Life, and He will confess your name, even yours, before His Father and before His holy angels.

SERMON XII.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

(2nd Lesson for 23rd Sunday after Trinity, 1853.)

“ There was a certain rich man which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day ; and there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table ; moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom ; the rich man also died, and was buried. And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said : Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may



dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue : for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said : Son, remember that thou, in thy lifetime, receivedst good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things ; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed ; so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot ; neither can they pass to us, who would come from thence. Then he said : I pray thee therefore, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house ; for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham said unto him : They have Moses and the prophets ; let them hear them. And he said : Nay, Father Abraham ; but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him : If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."—St. Luke xvi. 19—31,

WHAT was this parable spoken for ?

I have met with people who suppose it was written to teach how, as a general rule, rich men are selfish and wicked. Perhaps some of you may have thought this, or something like it. You remember the texts which speak of the difficulty rich men have in getting to Heaven ; and perhaps you think this is a story tending to the

same end. You call to mind the young man who came to the Lord, asking what he must do to inherit eternal life, and who, on being told that he must sell all he had and give to the poor, "went away very sorrowful, for he had great possessions." You think of the words of our blessed Lord, that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Or the parable of the sower and the seed occurs to you, in which we are taught that the deceitfulness of riches chokes the word. Or you think of the words of St. Paul to Timothy, that "they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and many foolish and hurtful lusts." It appears to you, therefore, that rich men must run a great risk of eternal loss, and that the state of riches must be in itself a bad state. And so, it may be that this parable, in its sad account of the rich man at whose gate Lazarus lay, and his miserable end, is in your eyes one of many proofs which Holy Scripture contains, that, though not without exceptions, his end is the end of most rich men. And then, as it seems to be implied that one part of his wickedness consisted in his

never giving any relief to the poor, sick Lazarus, who lay in such a miserable plight at his door ; you perhaps imagine that it may be another aim of this parable to teach the duty of giving alms, (as no doubt that is a Christian duty,) and to warn the rich that unless they do, their end will assuredly be the same as that of the rich man in the parable. And yet, once more, there may be some, for aught I know, for very strange notions do get into the minds of some people, as to the meaning of scriptural narratives—there may, I say, be some who gather from this parable the notion, that to be poor, is in itself a sort of merit ; that if we have a very hard fight of it in this life, we have a good reason to hope God will make up for that by making us everlastingly blessed hereafter ; and that they who have in this life evil things, will be pretty sure, unless they have been very wicked indeed, to have in the next life good things. I do not suppose that any one, at least, who has long attended on the ministry of God's ordinances, would, in so many words, profess to believe all this ; and yet, is there not a vague sort of notion in very many minds, that a rich man, because he is a rich man, is far more

likely to go to hell at last, than to heaven ; and that a poor man, simply as a poor man, is far more likely at last to go to Heaven than to Hell ? The rich man, in this parable, is taken to represent rich men as a class ; and Lazarus is taken to represent poor men as a class. Now, no doubt, my friends, there are many great dangers and temptations attending the state of riches. God's Word has told us that there are, and that Word can never tell us what is not true. But that Word tells us also, and your catechism has told all of you to remember and lay to heart the truth, that every state of life is ordered by God ; that if we are rich, we are rich because God has ordered it so ; that if we are poor, we are poor because that is God's ordering too ; that if we have family ties and duties, God tells us to look upon them as divinely arranged for us ; and that if our lot be rather a lonely one, in which we have no such ties or duties, this also is because God has seen it best for us that we should walk somewhat solitarily on our way, and be always ready for whatever work of active service, or still and quiet submission, He may assign to us. And thus, you see, that blessed Word of God which teaches us

to look upon the state in which we are born, or into which we are brought by what men call the force of circumstances, as *that* state into which it has pleased God to call us, teaches us that it is wrong to look upon any such state of life as essentially evil. It is only evil if we make it so, by our want of faithfulness to the trust God has reposed in us. Into the state of riches God calls some; into the state of poverty, He calls others. We cannot leave the one state for the other, except in obedience to the guiding of His Providence, without neglecting positive duties which He had laid upon us; and they who do thus, as it were, violently and by force, leave the one state for the other, generally find that they have sacrificed both happiness and usefulness. The state in which you *are*, then, whatever it is, is that into which God has called you. On the one hand, riches may be a very blessed state. It is not always so: the man with the finest house and grounds, and the largest number of servants, and all things that the heart can desire, is not always a man to be envied. Before envying such a man, you must first know all about him, his family, his friends, his very hopes and fears. You must

look into his heart, and make sure first that there is not a canker somewhere, eating at the root of all his happiness. This you may find in cases where you least expect it. And yet, as I have said, riches may be a very blessed state.

First, as any state assigned to us by God, who cannot err, and will not injure us, must needs be blessed. For blind and ignorant creatures, like us, it is no small happiness to know that we are not left to cut out for ourselves a way in which we shall walk, but that it is already marked out for us, with exceeding clearness and certainty, and that we are simply to take that way, as good and obedient children of God. Then again, there is always great blessedness in the faithful administration of a trust, and riches are a very solemn and sacred trust; as much a gift of God as strength of body and mind is; as much in the nature of a stewardship, which we are to administer for a little while, and then yield up to Him who placed it in our hands. On a great estate there are servants who work upon the land, but there are also stewards, and teachers, and others who have each their special service. And so also in God's king-

dom, there are those who are called to be ministers of the riches He has given them—to husband it, so that it shall not be spent on things vain and unprofitable; and also to dispense it, that it may not fail of the end for which it was given. And yet, once more, it is a blessed thing for those who have learned to sorrow in their Lord's deep, earthly sorrows, to feel deep and true compassion, mingled with shame and indignation, as looking back they seem to see the Son of Man wandering on in weariness, as He *did* wander, without where to lay His head. It is a very blessed thing for such as these, when God has given them any portion of this world's good, more than supplies for their own barest need, to see in every disciple of Christ one whom the common Lord and Master of us all has, affectingly, commended to their care—to recognise in each, at every season of want, not merely a suffering man or woman, but Christ suffering in them, and pleading in their behalf; to supply the needed food and to support the drooping head, as fain they would have nourished, and cherished, and pillowed the head of Him who of old “was despised and rejected of men,—a man of sorrows and acquainted

with grief." The state of riches, therefore, to one who regards all he has as a trust, and himself as knit together with Christ in one communion and fellowship with every suffering man, may be very blessed, and if it affords many temptations to evil, does also afford a much wider scope to the loving efforts of goodness.

And so also the state of poverty, while in itself not essentially holier than that of riches, may yet be also a very holy and blessed one, to one who is an earnest and devout Christian. For, as it is the chiefest joy of the Christian rich man to regard in every sufferer one who bears witness to Him of his suffering Saviour, and to minister to him in the name of Christ,—so also, the Christian poor man finds, in the daily and hourly experiences of his life, a sort of peculiar and inner link of sympathy with his Saviour, to which his richer neighbour is necessarily a stranger. His poverty should be to him but a of sort lower and more familiar sacrament. It should powerfully declare to him the love of his Saviour who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor. Its every privation should be to him a fresh witness of the greatness of that love. For if poverty be so hard a thing to one who has

never known any other lot : or, at the least, a lot not many degrees removed from it ; what must it have been to the Lord of Glory, who, though rich in all that can gladden the heart, emptied Himself of it all for us ? Poverty should thus be to the Christian a witness and a pledge of the grace of Christ. It should be the outward and visible sign of an inward state of heart, unto which it were very blessed to be brought. And how should the remembrance of his Saviour's poverty react practically upon himself, even as the remembrance of his passion does, leading him into the same entire dependence on the will of God, and have trust in His help, teaching him, when tempted to idleness, that he must not try the providence of the Lord his God, by neglecting the ordinary means of getting his daily bread—teaching him, when tempted to supply his wants by dishonest means, that man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God—that is, that even if all ordinary means *should* fail, God will never suffer those who trust Him to be confounded, but will raise up some other means—and teaching him, when tempted to murmur and be discontented, how

shameful a thing it is to murmur under the very eye of that Lord who bore all His far heavier privations with such patient and unmurmuring lips.

Such, then, being the teaching of Holy Scripture, and of our blessed Lord's example, as to riches and poverty, it is plain that this parable does not mean to teach us that the one state is in itself a holier state than the other. But it holds out to us, as a warning, the case of one who has all in this world that his heart can desire, and yet whose end is utter hopeless misery ; while it places in strong contrast to this the case of another, as wretched as wretched could be, yet who in the end was blessed with such blessedness as God alone can reward His faithful children with. And this different end of these two men, the narrative leads us to connect, not with their outward state, but with their state of mind and heart, and the conduct which sprang from it.

Now, there are not many things told us about them ; but the few things that are suggest a good many more. The rich man, we are told, was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. Now, to understand the full

meaning of these words, it is right that you should be told something about the clothing this man chose for himself. It was the very costliest he could have chosen. The purple dye was got from a very small fish, and as each one only yielded a few drops, it was enormously expensive. The linen, too, in ancient times, was sometimes so valuable that it was sold for its weight in gold. Thus, you see, he spared nothing when his object was to gratify his own love of display. And then, in regard to bodily comforts, it seems to have been his *constant* practice to pamper himself. He fared sumptuously, not only now and then, but every day. He must have had plenty to spend, and he spent it freely, but all on *himself*. Now, you will say, what great harm was there in this? "May a man not do what he likes with his own?" If he did not pity a poor starving sick man, that was *one* thing; but had he not a right to spend his money otherwise, as he pleased? My brethren, it would appear not, and for this reason, that it was not his own. All that we have, whether it be much or little, is not ours, but God's: and He gives it to us, first, in answer to our prayer for daily bread, that we may provide for our bodily

and mental health and strength; secondly, that we may fulfil His law of love, by caring for others; and always, and above all, that, through our way of spending it, God may be glorified. But it would seem that this rich man did not believe this: and here was the secret of all his sin. Perhaps he did not profess to be an infidel. I dare say he went through his form of prayers as well as his neighbours: there was nothing to find fault with in his creed; and even his life does not seem to have been outwardly and grossly wicked. He might be like many a respectable well-to-do man. Very likely he "kept to his church;" he "read his book;" he did just what other respectable people did. But, for all that, he said in his heart, *there is no God*. He was a God unto himself. He treated everything that belonged to him as if it were absolutely his. He thought nothing of *duties* he owed in consequence of being rich: he thought only of his *rights*. He thought nothing of an account to be given for his stewardship. He said, just as a great many others now say, may I not do what I like with my own? Self was all he thought about. And, thinking only of it, there was nothing to soften him—nothing holy

enough or sublime enough to cause a solemn awe now and then to steal over him ; or if ever, in spite of himself, there did steal over him that strange mysterious sense of something spiritual and unseen which now and then warns even wicked men, he felt it a discomfort, and made haste to put it away from him, and drowned all thought of it in fresh feasting and amusement. And so it happened that his heart grew harder and harder. As he went out of his splendid house, he saw crowded around the porch, waiting for the broken meat and bread that his servants cast away as unfit for use, a stray beggar now and then contending with the hungry dogs that prowled about for the scanty fare. There might be at first more than Lazarus, but the others would soon lose heart. He alone remained. Perhaps among the guests of the rich man he hoped to have received something. Even the servants might take compassion on him. At first, the rich man would look at him with a sort of disgust, as he lay there covered with sores ; and then he would, by degrees, avoid the sight of him as he would any other unpleasant object ; and at last, perhaps, passing him so often unheeded, he would come to

forget that he was there. But, if so, it was the forgetfulness of a hard heart, of a soul unawed by the thought of God's law and His reckoning—in short, of a man with no fear of God before his eyes.

Brethren, are there none like this man, even among those who are not commonly numbered with the rich? There may not be the same power of gratifying vanity in expensive dress and fine clothes; but is there the same hankering after it, so as to make us fear that there is just as much vanity and love of display, according to your means of gratifying it? There may not be the same daily feastings, because that is impossible; but is there the same disposition to spend all upon yourself—to pamper your body to the utmost—to indulge yourself in a lazy, selfish, indulgent course of life, without asking what claims there may be upon your time and your help, what poor neighbours you might assist, what work of charity or mercy you might do for God? When you hear of any one you could influence for good, falling into grievous sin, or for lack of a kind word spoken on his behalf, sinking into temporal distress, is there the same disposition to say, *that is his business, it is no concern of mine?* If so, my brother, you have good

cause to be afraid. This is the spirit stealing over you which utterly ruined the rich man in this narrative. You, too, are saying in your heart, there is no God—no one to whom you are accountable—no one who, looking round on this one or that one whom you treated in this cold, unfeeling way, will say to you, “Inasmuch as thou didst it not to the least of these my brethren, thou didst it not to me.” You are all members of Christ’s body, and therefore every sin and every sorrow of a brother or sister in Christ, ought to be matter of deepest concern to you, is every day of your life matter of strict inquiry at Christ’s judgment-seat. And be sure of this, that if you would do real good to your fellow-creatures, to your neighbours, whether nearer or more distant, the root and centre of this well-doing must be an earnest faith in God—a belief that He is really present amongst us—that when Christ said, *Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world*, this was no figure of speech, but a solemn reality. And oh, if you could sometimes see the look He casts upon you, when, in your unbelief of His nearness, you have done some unbrotherly and heartless action, I think it would surely be with

you as it was with His Apostle of old—you would be fain to go away from His presence, and “weep bitterly.”

There is something striking in the tenderness of the dumb creatures who gathered round the gate with Lazarus, as contrasted with that of his fellow-man. “Moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores.” Man, when rendered callous by long persistence in sin, becomes a far more degraded being—a being far more insensible to the commonest instincts of tenderness, than even the brutes that perish. But we must pass on from this point of the narrative, and look for a moment at the respective end of the rich man and Lazarus. First of all, *the beggar died*. Perhaps his life was not only a more sorrowful one, but far shorter than that of the other. At last he “had a happy release.” But after death, what a changed lot was his! “He was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom.” As if to show us that heaven is not the heritage of poor or rich alone, here we see the beggar Lazarus, and the wealthy and powerful patriarch Abraham, at last glorified together. And by-and-bye the rich man also died. Wretched ending to a life of false

pleasure! He is now in hell; he is "in torment;" and, as if this were not enough to fill up his cup of misery, he sees Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, to remind him of his wasted life, and bring back to his thoughts the many seasons of repentance and amendment which he once had, but are now gone for ever. Strange, that Lazarus, once so completely forgotten, should now have been so immediately recognised! This circumstance seems to bring to our thoughts a thing which is almost certain, as it is a very startling, fact. I have read of some one, to whom, in a period of illness, there came back most vividly, all the events of her life: scenes, and persons, and words, which had long been completely forgotten, were all recalled with a painful vividness. And it may well startle us to think how it would be if our entrance on the unseen world were suddenly to flash upon us all our forgotten words and deeds—sins that we had long ago lost sight of, yet which will then be seen with all their frightful and hitherto unknown consequences branching out from them most plainly—persons whom our words or example helped to ruin, long forgotten, now at once re-

cognised—forgotten by us, but known all the while to God, and bearing witness against us before him. If our lot be hell, this will indeed be *torment*; if we be separated from it, by that great gulf which no man can pass, it will be well nigh hopeless torment; for it is Christ only who can take away these fears, since in Him alone it is that our transgressions can be forgiven, and our sins covered.

Yet, in the midst of this rich man's torment, what strange request is this he makes? "I pray thee, father Abraham, that thou wouldest send Lazarus to my father's house: for I have five brethren: that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment." Can there, then, in that scene of future woe, remain in a lost soul such a feeling as pity for those that are in danger of coming into a like case with himself? The words would seem to imply that there may, and yet even that is not certain. These five brethren in his father's house, had they not been partakers with him in his hard-hearted, indolent, self-indulgent life? And had he not reason to fear that, if they came into that place of torment, they would charge upon him their ruin—

would *curse* him—and so render hell to him a place of yet more intolerable torment? Whatever motive may be supposed to have weighed with him in his prayer, Abraham's answer is full of instruction to us: "They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them:" and, "If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they hear, though one rose from the dead." Is it not what many a heart has said, "If something more were done to make me believe—some wonder to be wrought—then I could believe." But, if you believe not on the evidence you have, no amount of evidence could ever make you believe. And let me remind you, brethren, that you have that very evidence which the rich man sought: One *has* risen from the dead, whose voice is always sounding in your ears. He tells you that in Him is life, that apart from Him are death and ruin. He bids you choose between a state of oneness with Him, and a lifeless, loveless state, in which you will be left to find out that to "live to the flesh," is really to become spiritually dead. That you might not doubt His good-will towards you, or fear lest the state of life is not for such an one as you, He has Himself broken down the wall which held you apart

from God, who is the source of life. He tells you that if "any man be in Christ, he is a new creature," that all the old traditions of the selfish and despairing life he was leading are by that covenant of union scattered to the winds; that in Him the sinner now rises out of helpless subjection to the fleshly law of bondage and corruption into willing subjection to the Christian law of liberty and immortality; and that he may now fearlessly take his place among those who, in a world beset by dismal fears, are yet standing fast in the Lord, and learning, through faith in the Son of God, to beat down under their feet all foul and fleshly lusts, all vain and worldly desires, all with which Satan would hurt or beguile them. Yet He who has risen from the dead to tell us this, also tells us, on the other hand, to be afraid of separating ourselves from him, by any persistence in known sin; He bids us see that life apart from Him is death, that this death, to one created in God's image, is hell, and that in hell there is torment. He summons before our minds a terrible picture of a state in which we shall find at last that the secret of our torment is, our banishment from God, and this, coming upon the soul together with the

consciousness, at last, of what it would have been to dwell with Him. To see the glory of God, and yet not to be able to draw near; to see His love, and yet to be ourselves loveless and hopeless; and to remember, in the past years of our mistaken life, how often God called to us, and how much otherwise it might have been, had we given heed to his voice, and turned, and repented—what can be a more awful possibility than this? Here the parable stops, and we need go no farther. It suggests to those who hear it the mysteries of woe into which sin can plunge the sinner. Assuredly, if we will not believe—if, after such a warning, we can go on dallying with that which is ruining our souls; neither would we believe, though one rose from the dead.

In conclusion, brethren, let me remind you, in prospect of next Sunday's Holy Communion, that here, in this parable, are many matters of solemn self-questioning. Let us take it home with us, and consider it well. Let us ask whether death would be to us what it was to Lazarus. Let us ask whether life is still to us what it was to the rich man. Let us try our conduct by all the practical tests here given us. Let us see whether all

our duties, to God our Father, to Christ our blessed Saviour, to our friends and neighbours, to our Church and parish, are faithfully discharged? We shall all find many sad omissions. Some of us may find that we have been falling into positively *bad* ways. God forbid that we should not look these things fairly in the face! God forbid that we should say, "All is well"—when we know in our heart and conscience that there is much which is very seriously ill! And God forbid, either, that we should go on from month to month making these confessions, and thinking no more about them. Let us see that our repentance of sin, and our intention to lead a new life, is *true* and *earnest*, so that when we draw near to take that holy sacrament, it may be indeed to our *comfort*.

FINIS.





